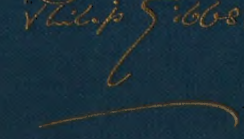

DARKENED ROOMS

A NOVEL

By

PHILIP GIBBS

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BOOK ONE

EMERY JAGO

I

It was a police constable on night duty between the *Bon Marché*, Brixton, that overpopulated suburb of south-west London and Ezra Road which was the end of his beat, who became interested in what he called certain "goings-on" at a photographer's shop where Ezra Road joins Electric Avenue.

He decided to mention the matter one night to the inspector who was making his rounds in a drizzle of rain which blurred the lights from the street lamps.

It was all quiet in Ezra Road. Bedroom windows, suddenly illuminated twenty minutes ago, had dimmed and darkened—except in Number 29, where a lady hadn't bothered to pull down the blinds and was brushing her hair with bare arms. The commercial traveller belonging to Number 31 had come home a little drunk, singing a snatch of "Tea for Two" before getting into trouble with his latch-key and returning to the bosom of his family. City clerks, typists, shop assistants had come home from the picture palaces and were settling down to sleep with the rest of the working world. The back streets of Brixton don't keep late hours.

"Anything to report?" asked the inspector after a friendly remark about "dirty weather." He liked to be human with his men.

"No, sir," said the young constable, who had been a gunner in the Great War and had a smart way with him which had already marked him down for promotion. "Nothing definite, as you may say. But I've noticed something rather queer about that there photographer, Jago. Number 35."

He flashed his bull's-eye on to the shop front and revealed the name on the brass plate.

EMERY JAGO
Artist Photographer

"Anything suspicious?" asked the inspector. "Foreign kind of name, ain't it?"

"English, by the looks of 'im," said the constable. "Take's a drink now and again at the local pubs. Longish hair, clean-shaven when he shaves, artistic-looking, and a bit untidy with 'imself. Communistic, I wouldn't be surprised, knowing the type."

"Ah!" said the inspector darkly.

"Seems to know the smart set," said the constable. "Lately they've been coming up in their cars at odd times—after theatre hours now and again. Young females a bit short in the frock, with young gents in evening clothes and opera hats. Claridge's and Carlton stuff, by the look of them. They go in by the side-door and stay the best part of an hour. Thought I'd better report it."

"Just as well, Budd," said the inspector.

"And as a case in point," said Budd, surprised that Providence should supply immediate proof, "here comes a party like I've been describing. A Rolls-Royce this time. Better take cover, sir, don't you think?"

The officer and his man withdrew into the dark doorway of a tobacconist's shop next to the photographer's. The headlamps of the Rolls-Royce were searchlights sweeping the wet pavement of Electric Avenue before turning into Ezra Road and shining along the shuttered shop-fronts. Their glare caught a lean cat slinking round a dustbin and its eyes gleamed like amethysts. The long body of the motor-car with its raking line and silver bonnet swished quietly along the kerbstone. The chauffeur's cap was silhouetted at the side of his wheel as he stared up at the numbers and then put on the brake outside the photographer's shop. A white hand touched a switch inside the car which was suddenly filled with a soft rose-coloured light.

There were four people inside—a girl in a green silk

cloak which fell away from her bare shoulders, and three men.

One of them—a good-looking boy—opened the door of the Rolls-Royce and asked a question of the chauffeur.

"Sure this is the place, Bennet?"

"It's the number," said the chauffeur rather sulkily. "According to Professor Boyd."

"Yes, that's all right."

The young man glanced at the name on the brass plate and gave a nervous laugh. He flicked open his opera hat which he had held under his arm, and thrust it to the back of his head.

"Don't you think we might give it a miss?" he asked, addressing the two men and the girl in the car.

"Good Lord, no!" said a hearty voice. "You're not funking it, are you, Billy? It's going to be amusing, and I'm getting interested in this sort of thing. Out you get, dear lady."

The girl in the green silk cloak accepted the hand of the young man who had been first on the pavement. She stood under the street lamp which gave a glint of bronze to her shingled hair. She had covered her bare shoulders because of the dampness of the night although the drizzle of rain had stopped.

"Feeling nervous, Billy?" she asked the young man—hardly more than a boy—who had helped her out.

He was lighting a cigarette and the flare of the match revealed his clean-shaven face, rather thin and delicate.

"I don't approve of this sort of thing," he said. "It seems to me next door to blasphemy. However, as I owe everything to Mr. Mallard I have to follow his adventurous lead. To the gates of hell, so to speak."

"Oh, I don't think it's as bad as all that!" said the girl. She laughed quietly and then used the light of the head-lamps to slip off a diamond wrist-watch, which she handed to the young man with the cigarette.

"Slip that into your pocket, Billy. One never knows in places like this, does one?"

"Oh, it's not that kind of risk," he answered, but he put the watch in the fob pocket of his white waistcoat.

The two other men came out of the car, dropping their half-burned cigars. One of them was a middle-aged

man with red hair and an ugly, whimsical face blinkered by a pair of horn spectacles. He had a black tie over a crumpled shirt front and his dinner jacket looked too short for him, so that his bony wrists showed beyond his cuffs. He hid his red hair under a black felt hat with a broad brim.

"We might learn something," he said, "about our frightful past or our still more frightful future. It was Lady Ardington who gave me the tip about these people. They scared her horribly by producing her second husband whom she had hoped to forget—and she takes a bit of scaring."

"Well, they won't scare me," said the young woman in the green cloak. "It's all nonsense, anyhow."

The red-headed man grinned through his horn-rimmed glasses.

"I don't dogmatise about these things. I approach them with scientific detachment. So far the evidence doesn't satisfy me, but as a psychologist I don't altogether deny——"

"Don't give us a lecture on the kerbstone, Professor!" said the boy who had the diamond wrist-watch in his fob pocket. He laughed, but rather impatiently.

The last man who stepped out of the Rolls-Royce was taller than his companions and as he stood under the lamp-post the white light revealed a hatchet face, very finely carved, with a raking jaw and thin, smiling lips. His brown hair was slightly silvered, and because of his height he stooped a little when he spoke to the girl.

"Directly you get bored—or frightened—give me a sign and we'll clear out. Perhaps we ought not to have brought you to a place like this. It's Boyd's fault. He stirred my curiosity by all that scientific rubbish he talked. And you know my insatiable interest in things. Do you mind?"

He looked at her with a sudden anxiety, as though he might be leading her into some unpleasantness.

"It's for your sake I mind," said the girl. "People might see you. It might get into the papers. You're always very rash, Mr. Mallard." She laughed in a low voice and her hand crept to his sleeve.

"No," he said, smiling down upon her. "I play for safety as a rule. Too much. . . . Well, we may as well get on with this absurd adventure. Is this the door, Boyd?"

"I'm trying to find the bell," said the man who answered to the name of Boyd. He was inside the dark doorway, and struck a match which went out instantly; then another, by the light of which he peered through his horn-rimmed glasses until he found the electric bell. They listened to the sound of its pinging inside the house. After a few moments there was a glimmer through the fanlight above the door, which opened an inch or two.

Boyd spoke.

"Is Mr. Jago at home?"

A girl's voice answered.

"Are you the party from the Carlton."

"Yes," said Boyd, "we telephoned."

"That's all right," said the girl's voice. The door opened, letting out a streak of yellow light from a narrow hall with a stretch of threadbare linoleum, a bamboo hat-stand, and a table with an aspidistra in a pot tied up in pink silk. The people from the Rolls-Royce went into the hall, the tall man with the silvered hair standing aside a moment to let the girl pass. Then the door was shut again.

The police inspector and the constable came out from the darkness of the doorway into which they had retired.

"Queer!" said the inspector.

"Seems so to me," said the young constable.

"That tall man—hatchet-faced, distinguished-looking sort—going grey before his time—do you know him at all?"

"Can't say as I do, sir. Face seems familiar, some-'ow."

"It ought to be!" said the inspector drily. "That's Mr. Adrian Mallard, K.C. Defended the Camberwell murderer and other famous criminals."

"You don't say so!"

The young constable was taken aback by this announcement.

"Yes. Queer!" said the inspector. "Better keep

an eye on this shop. Jago, did you say ? I'll have some inquiries made. Well, good-night, Budd."

He returned the constable's salute and paced slowly into Electric Avenue with a soft squelch of boots on the wet pavement.

II

THE girl who had opened the door led the way upstairs. Rose Jaffrey, who was the lady with the green silk cloak and a glint of bronze in shingled hair—her name and charm need no reminder to those of us who remember her in many gracious parts—followed her first and noticed the girl's thin shoulders under a cheap frock of black silk and her thin white arms with long nervous hands. She had a "ladder" in one of her stockings and the heels of her shoes were worn sideways as though she had weak ankles. Her face had been visible only while she held the door open in the dimly lit hall—a white face, rather pretty, like a wax doll which has been left out in the rain and has lost the colour from its cheeks, with big brown eyes that had a frightened look in them—or were only shy—and a mop of fair, fluffy hair.

The staircase was carpeted with old drugget and two of the banisters were broken. From the narrow hall below them there came up a reek which was interpreted by Boyd, a professor of psychology at King's College, but a humorist in his spare time.

"Steak and onions. Phew!"

The girl stopped on the landing above and glanced over her shoulder at the people following her.

"If you'll step into this room——" she said, and stood aside to let them pass through a narrow door.

It was a big, bare room, divided from another by a place for folding doors which had obviously been removed and replaced by a black curtain of imitation velvet, frayed at the edges and hung from a brass curtain-rod with rusty rings.

Against the walls were some wooden chairs stained brown, and in a corner of the room near the curtain was

a small compartment or alcove, with a framework of bamboo and covered in with some black hangings which seemed to divide in front like a tent. Near by was an electric lamp on a wooden pedestal.

"Won't you sit down?" asked the girl in a curiously toneless voice, which was not unpleasant. "I'll tell Mr. Jago. He's downstairs."

"We're rather in a hurry," said Adrian Mallard. "It's getting late, I'm afraid."

"He won't keep you long," said the girl. "Elsie is speaking to him—that's his control, you know—and he doesn't like interrupting her in case she has something important to say. . . . She's such a dear!"

She smiled with her lips, but her brown eyes looked gravely from one to another, rested for a moment on Rose Jaffrey, and studied Mallard with a flutter of eyelashes. Then she slipped out of the room, but, as Boyd pointed out afterwards, they did not hear her footsteps going downstairs again on her way to Jago.

"Well, here we are!" said Mallard, with cheerful irony. "It's up to you, Boyd. Won't you sit down, Rose? And don't look so scared, my dear! It's quite all right. Three of us to protect you from ghosts or devils." He raised her hand to his lips—that expressive hand which helped the magic of her words when she played her parts—and led her to one of the wooden chairs against the wall, where she sat down with a comical sigh, letting the green cloak slip from her shoulders.

"We ought to be ashamed of ourselves!" she said, smiling up at Mallard. "Such childish nonsense! As for you, Mr. Adrian Mallard, K.C.——"

Professor Boyd turned sharply.

"No names here," he said, "for heaven's sake!"

"Sorry!" said Rose Jaffrey, and put the tips of her fingers to her lips as though to keep back indiscretions.

Boyd was examining the room, feeling the walls, tapping them with his knuckles.

"Ghastly!" said the boy whom Miss Jaffrey had called Billy. He was Wilfred Neal, who was beginning his career in the Foreign Office, after Stonyhurst and Oxford.

Rose Jaffrey started in her chair and looked round

nervously, or perhaps made a pretence to do so, as a good actress with a sense of humour.

"Ghastly? What, Billy?"

"That wallpaper," said young Neal.

"Good heavens, yes!" agreed Mallard, staring with humorous horror at the pattern with purple flowers wreathed round a yellow trellis.

Boyd disappeared into the curtained alcove. They could see it bulging as his hands fumbled about inside.

"For goodness' sake don't do that, Mr. Boyd!" said Miss Jaffrey. "It looks perfectly horrible. All squirmy!"

Boyd reappeared and took off his horn-rimmed glasses to wipe them on a handkerchief.

"Nothing suspicious," he said. "No apparatus."

"I'm getting impatient," said Mallard. "How foolish of us to leave the Carlton for this rather smelly room! They keep mice here, I should say. Confound that spook merchant!"

"Hush!" said Miss Jaffrey, putting her hand on his arm.

The curtain which covered the place where there had once been folding doors was pulled on one side with a faint clink of rusty rings. A man came through and closed the curtain behind him and bowed slightly to the company.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," he said politely.

He was a younger man than Mallard, perhaps under thirty. He was meant to be clean-shaven, but his pale face was blue about the jaws as though his razor had not been active that day. It was a pale face with a rather long nose and thin lips, but one noticed his eyes first because of their dark, luminous melancholy. He wore his hair long, brushed back over his forehead without a parting, and slightly curled behind, where it touched the collar of a velvet jacket with frayed cuffs. His feet were in wool-worked slippers over which his trousers fell baggily. Rose Jaffrey remarked his hands. She always looked at people's hands as a test of character. They were small and plump, delicately made, almost womanish, but his finger-nails were dirty.

"Are you Mr. Jago?" asked Boyd.

The man nodded, and one of his small hands thrust back his hair.

"I understand you come on the recommendation of Lady Ardington?" he asked.

"Does that matter?" asked Boyd rather sharply.

"Not very much," answered Jago with a faint smile. "But we have to be careful, you know. The police are not friendly to spiritual investigations. They call it fortune-telling."

"And isn't it?" asked Mallard, with just the faintest touch of irony.

"The spirits don't call it that," said the man gravely. "When they come from behind the veil it is with no light purpose, sir. And I imagine you've not come here in a spirit of mockery?"

"By no means!" said Mallard courteously.

"I am glad," said the man. "The spirits resent frivolous inquirers. It angers them more than anything, as we may well understand, I think."

"That's all right," said Mallard. "Can't we get on with the——"

Perhaps he was going to use the word "show" until Rose Jaffrey touched his arm. He substituted the word "demonstration."

"My sister—that's the young woman you met on the stairs—is rather tired to-night," said Emery Jago. "The spirits have been giving her no rest lately. There's a Red Indian named Black Eagle who takes possession of her at times and is very insistent. Some wonderful things have come through from him. Warnings about the state of Europe. Conflict in China. Earthquakes in the United States. Many of them have been fulfilled."

"Rather a useful source of information," remarked Mallard quietly. He winked at Boyd very slightly.

"Is it possible to get in touch with some of your spirit friends?" asked Boyd politely, as though asking for an introduction to distinguished people.

"Yes," said young Neal, "let's get on with it!" He spoke impatiently, as though he disliked Emery Jago and the whole affair. "If you can call up spirits from the vasty deep, give us a proof of your mysterious powers."

"Personally, I have no powers," said Jago quietly. "I am merely the medium through which other voices speak—an instrument sensitive to psychic vibrations which use me as a kind of microphone by which they speak to human minds attuned to them in sympathy and reverence. . . . That, perhaps, is a reasonable explanation, though I make it humbly."

"Quite interesting," said Boyd, with a touch of professonial condescension. "Richet says something of the same kind."

"Yes," agreed Emery Jago. "He's a very good man."

Rupert Boyd, professor of biology in the University of London, looked mildly surprised at the erudition of this shabby medium over a shop in Brixton.

"Not that I've read his book," said the medium with a little deprecating gesture; "only extracts in *Light*."

He looked over at Mallard who had shifted on his chair with a sign of impatience.

"My sister and I are both sensitives," he explained. "She gets more quickly into touch with the other side. As you seem in a hurry——"

"Yes," said Mallard.

Emery Jago sighed, as though regretting this impatience.

He drew the black curtain slightly on one side and called in a gentle voice:

"Little sister!"

There was a moment's silence in the room, broken only by young Wilfred Neal who crossed his legs jerkily.

Then the girl with the face of a wax doll came from behind the curtain and stood with her hands clasped below her waist.

"Yes, brother?"

"We want you to go into the silence again. Not for long. We won't worry you. We know how tired you are."

He spoke gently, soothingly, as though to a child.

"Not too tired," she answered with a plaintive smile which made Rose Jaffrey feel very sorry for her.

The queer young man, Emery Jago, placed a chair for her, and she sat down in it with her chin raised, showing

her thin white neck above the black frock, and resting her head on the top rail of the chair.

Her brother, as he had called himself, turned out the light by a switch near the mantelpiece, and there was only one little glow of red light from the lamp on the wooden pedestal. All the room was in darkness except for that red bulb by which they could see vaguely the girl's face and the shadowy form of Jago in his black velvet jacket, his small hands faintly illuminated and moving slowly and rhythmically above the girl's head.

"Sleep, little sister," he said caressingly. "How tired you are! You feel heavy-eyed. You seem to be dropping, dropping, into the depths of sleep. Into the great silence. So quiet. So very silent. Into the stillness. Into slumberland. Into dreamland. . . ."

He ceased this monologue. A long-drawn sigh came from the girl. Her head with its mop of fair hair seemed to fall sideways. Her lips were parted slightly and her eyes closed.

"She has gone into the silence," said Jago softly. He stood on one side with his arms folded. Rose Jaffrey saw the white vagueness of his face, and his eyes were luminous like a cat's in that dark room. He was looking toward Mallard.

Suddenly music played—a little tinkling, merry tune, as though it came from a child's musical box. It seemed to come from beneath Rose Jaffrey's feet and she drew them back timidly and sharply.

"They greet her with music," said Jago. "It is Elsie playing. That is our little sister who passed over ten years ago."

The music ended and Jago spoke quietly again, leaning over the girl.

"Is that you, Elsie?"

From the girl in the chair there came a laughing, childish voice.

"Good evening, Em! Did you like my tune? The birds like it in my garden. It makes them sing so sweetly, like little angels."

"That's all right, darling," said Jago, "but we want you to run away and play to-night. You see, other dear spirits are waiting to get through. There's

someone down here who wants to speak with long-lost friends. You understand, don't you ? ''

A child's voice laughed merrily. It came from the parted lips of the girl with the wax-like face whose eyes were closed and whose head had flopped sideways against the back of the chair.

'' Oh, if you don't want me I shall run into the light fountains and play hide and seek with the waterdrops ! ''

There was silence again. It lasted a minute as Boyd timed it by the luminous hands of his wrist-watch. To Rose Jaffrey it seemed like ten. She wondered what Adrian Mallard was thinking. Turning her head slightly, she could see his fine profile faintly visible in the darkness. At the Carlton his eyes had spoken love to her so clearly that even the waiters must have seen. It was getting dangerous for her as well as for him. How could she go on resisting his kindness, his tenderness, his foolish worship of her ?

From the girl on the kitchen chair strange noises were coming. She was going to have a fit or something. They were gurgling, epileptic noises, and rather horrible.

'' A spirit is struggling to come through,'' said Emery Jago in his quiet voice.

A man's voice spoke through the lips of the girl in her trancelike state.

'' Say, kid, here I am again. Black Eagle speaking. Do you remember where we left off last time ? Wasn't I putting you wise about that revolution stuff in China ? It's darned serious for the poor old British Empire and those more or less United States. The beginning of the Yellow Peril, and no bunk this time.''

Jago's voice came through the darkness, explanatory, whispering.

'' That's a Red Indian chief. He was an airman in the war, with the American Army, and crashed somewhere in France. He seems to be interested in China.''

The voice went on speaking, with a strong American accent, harsh and nasal. He mentioned the names of various Chinese generals and said that one was Satan's chief lieutenant. It all seemed very dull to Rose Jaffrey, especially as it lasted for ten minutes or more. The others were getting restless too. She was aware of their

impatience. Wilfred Neal—Billy, as she called him—sighed heavily several times and scraped his heels on the bare boards. Her attention wandered. She was thinking of Evelyn Mallard, Adrian's wife. The last time they had met she had said something rather cattish with an air of charming graciousness in a thin, tired voice.

"My husband is one of your devoted admirers, Miss Jaffrey. Personally, I find Shakespeare rather vulgar, but then, you see, I have no intelligence. Adrian found that out a long time ago. I prefer bridge, and the latest jazz tune."

She had smiled when she said that, but somehow it had made Rose shiver. Another unhappy marriage! How many she knew like that which had seemed to start so happily. Was there no loyalty in love? No happiness after the first few weeks of passion? . . . What was that man saying now—that medium with the long hair and womanish hands? Was there any truth in this sort of thing?

"There is another spirit trying to communicate. Black Eagle is angry. . . . It is a young spirit. Young and vital. . . . Insistent."

A new voice rang through the room. A boy's voice, cheerful and jolly, coming from that poor hypnotized creature with her head on one side.

"Is that you, Adrian, old boy?"

Adrian Mallard gave a slight start in his chair. Rose Jaffrey saw the fingers of his right hand tapping on his knee as he sat with his legs crossed.

"Is there anyone here named Adrian?" asked Jago in a whisper. "If there is, let him answer the spirit voice."

Mallard remained silent, and Rose Jaffrey saw Boyd turn his head slightly in Mallard's direction.

"Are you there, Adrian?" said the masculine voice, speaking through the hypnotized girl.

"Answer!" whispered Jago.

Mallard stirred in his chair.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Don't you know me, old man?" said the boyish voice again. "This is Ivo speaking."

Mallard's chair creaked sharply. Rose Jaffrey and

the others could see his dark form lean forward suddenly as though startled. She felt herself become pale, with a nasty feeling of goose-flesh up her back.

Mallard had had a young brother named Ivo killed in the war. She had read his sonnets, written in a dug-out on the Somme, and letters home which had been published with a preface from Adrian exquisitely written.

Mallard answered again, coldly, but with a slight tremor in his voice.

"Why do you call yourself 'Ivo'?"

The girl, or the voice speaking through her, laughed in a boyish way.

"You didn't want a proof that I was your brother when we used to rag together down at Southlands. I've been trying to come to you ever since the bloody old war. Once I stood in your bedroom and called out to you, but you thought you were dreaming and went to sleep again. Don't you remember?"

Mallard seemed to remember. His answer was an admission, with a doubt.

"Most people dream now and then."

"You've been doing great things since the war," said the voice. "Bravo, Adrian. That's the stuff to give 'em. Your friends on this side are proud of your career. It's going to be bigger still if you take my advice."

"What's that?" asked Mallard.

"Watch your step with the pretty ladies, old lad."

There was a faint guffaw of laughter from the direction of Boyd, hushed instantly by the man Jago.

"I really must insist upon absolute silence," he said sternly. "Surely this is not the time for irreverence. We are in the presence of the other world."

Rose Jaffrey, sitting there in the darkness, felt a wave of hot colour flame into her face. She missed some of the rest of the conversation—things about the war, and Eton, and the spirit world. "This friendship of ours!" she thought. "Perhaps people know. We shall have to be careful." Then she listened again to that boy's voice coming from the lips of the hypnotized girl.

"You'll have to look after your health, Adrian. You work too hard, old man. Give yourself a rest now and then. You were like that at Oxford—always swotting."

"What college?" asked Mallard sharply, as though interrogating a hostile witness.

There was a long pause, and the voice was fainter when it spoke again.

"I don't quite hear you," said the voice. "You seem to speak in a muffled way. . . . I can't see you now. . . . I'm slipping back, old man. . . . Come again. I want to tell you all sorts of things. . . . Remember Jago and his sister. I can reach you through them. . . . Well, so long."

The girl in the chair was making queer noises again. Her eyelids fluttered. A convulsive tremor passed through her and then suddenly she sat up and opened her eyes in a dazed way.

"Have I come back?" she asked.

The man Jago patted her on the head.

"Tired, little sister? A new spirit has been talking through you. Someone quite new. A boy called Ivo."

"My head aches," said the girl. She put the tips of her fingers to her forehead and gave a little whimper.

"Poor creature!" whispered Rose Jaffrey under her breath. When the man had turned up the lights again she could see that Adrian Mallard was rather pale, though he smiled at her and shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly.

"It was very short this time," said the young man with the small hands and dirty finger-nails.

"And ended rather abruptly," said Mallard with a faint ironic smile. "I think the spirit was rather baffled by the name of that college."

"There was a hostile influence present," said Emery Jago, looking at young Neal, that good-looking boy who had Rose Jaffrey's wrist-watch in his pocket. "They always disappear when they're aware of spiritual unfriendliness."

"A convenient way out, perhaps," said the young man accused by the medium's dark eyes. He laughed scornfully until Boyd nudged him.

Mallard slipped some notes into the man's hand and turned to the lady.

"Shall we go?"

"Perhaps we may have the pleasure of another visit

from you," suggested Emery Jago, the medium. "I don't know who Ivo is, but he will certainly find his way through again now that he has established contact."

"I had a brother of that name," said Mallard gravely. He glanced at the medium with steely eyes, as though piercing to the truth in him. "Perhaps you knew?"

"No," said the medium. "Killed in the war, perhaps?"

Mallard nodded.

"These young souls—cut off so suddenly—keep breaking through," said Jago quietly.

Mallard hesitated, as though about to say something else, and then turned on his heel.

"Coming, Boyd?" he said to the red-headed man who was blinking round the room through his horn-rimmed glasses.

Miss Jaffrey bowed to Jago, and then in an impetuous way held out her hand to the girl with the mop of fair hair who had come out of a trance.

"My poor child," she said, "I am so sorry for you!"

The words were spoken with kindness, but for some reason the girl flushed very deeply and looked offended.

"No need, I'm sure," she said.

Miss Jaffrey left the room first, then Mallard, then Boyd, and lastly, young Neal, whom they called Billy. The girl followed them downstairs and let them out of the front door.

Then she went upstairs again into the barely furnished room where Emery Jago stood by the window which he had opened quietly after switching off the light.

"Are you there, Em?" asked the girl, standing by the doorway and feeling her way into the darkness with outstretched hands. "Why have you turned the light out again? I'm sick of this damned darkness!"

"Hush!" said the man shortly. "Keep quiet, can't you?"

He stood listening to a conversation in the street below. Every word of it was audible through the open window as it came up from those four people who stood in the blurred light of the street lamp. The rain had stopped but there was a damp mist about them.

"An absolute fake!" said a boy's voice.

It was young Neal who spoke.

Mallard's voice rang out as he stood under the lamp-post, his profile clearly defined.

"Probably. . . . But I confess it gave me rather a turn when I heard poor Ivo's name."

He laughed good-humouredly.

"How the deuce did that girl know about that night when I thought I saw his ghost?"

"Mental telepathy," said Rose Jaffrey.

"Oh, that explains nothing," said the red-headed man. "Far more likely——"

"I'm freezing to death!" cried Miss Jaffrey with an exaggerated shiver.

"Yes, let's take the lady home," said Mallard. "There may be no truth in spiritualism—it's very unconvincing—but there's a lot in pneumonia!"

They packed into the Rolls-Royce and up in the window of his dark room the luminous eyes of Emery Jago watched the glare of headlights swish down Ezra Road.

"Belle," he said, turning to the girl behind him, "did you notice that young lady's hair?"

"No," answered the girl sulkily.

"It was bronze-coloured," he said thoughfully.

"Well, what about it?" asked the girl, with a sharp note of suspicion. "What do you mean, Em?"

"Nothing," said Emery Jago. "Supposing we have a cup of cocoa."

III

THOSE people who came in a Rolls-Royce to the photographer's shop in the Ezra Road, Brixton, do not matter just yet. They are only a proof that Emery Jago touched high society at times in his strange and interesting career. And that is remarkable when one knows something about his humble origin and his rather solitary boyhood as the only son of a cabinet-maker and upholsterer in a small shop along the Brixton Road. Some of the neighbours told stories about his early life when he became famous in the psychic world. His mother, poor soul, had been a dancing girl in the Rosenbaum Troupe until she developed consumption and married Jago and spent most of her days doing needlework in the back room behind the shop.

Little Emery was a delicate boy, said the neighbours—a seven months' child, as his mother told them, proud of his intelligence. Perhaps it was ill-health which kept him away from the rough boys of the neighbourhood who used to make their playground in the streets. Young Em, as they called him, was fond of his books, and sat up doing his home-lessons while his mother coughed her lungs out and looked up now and then to say a word to her boy.

"Aren't you working too 'ard, Em?"

He was impatient with her in those days, as afterwards he confessed.

"Oh, shut up, Mother! 'Ow can I get on with this 'ere problem if you keep on interrupting?"

That was when he used to drop his aitches.

"All right, Em. Only I don't want you to get brain fever or anything."

He was always high in his class in the elementary

school. "Studies well, but highly strung," was one report he had, and his mother was proud of that "highly strung."

"Same as a violin, my dear," said Mrs. Jago to her husband, who was a silent man, generally with tin-tacks in his mouth until after working hours which were often late.

Even the boy's games were serious and unusual. He learned to do tricks out of the *Boys' Book of Conjuring* which he bought one day in the Charing Cross Road, and he used to make his mother laugh until she coughed, with a little blood on her handkerchief, by producing coins out of her hair or ears, or hiding something in the teapot and discovering it in her work-basket.

One day he bought a tame rabbit and made it jump out of the coalscuttle after his mother had agreed that there was nothing inside but a lump of coal. It gave her an awful start, but she couldn't be angry with this dark-eyed boy of hers—wonderful eyes he had—and his clever ways. Then there was ventriloquism, which didn't work very well, and fret-work and other hobbies until he became too old for such amusements and studied to be a teacher. That was when the war came, and the air-raids which made him nervous. He reached the pimply stage and became moody and irritable for a time, and refused to account for his doings when he came home late and sneaked up to his bedroom when his mother lay awake anxious about him. "Some girl," she thought. Or, "Them young hussies in Electric Avenue!"

It was when he was a teacher at Walworth, still living at home, that he took up another hobby. It was photography this time, and the beginning of a new career.

At first he experimented with his mother and made her sit for him in the back yard or with the light falling on the side of her face from the window—"Rembrandt effects," he said—and then spent the evening developing his plates upstairs. Later on he went for long walks in the country and brought back photographs of old cottages and country lanes.

"Beautiful, Em!" said his mother. "They ought to be published, I'm sure. They're as good as pictures."

"Yes," he said, "I've a good mind to chuck teaching.

It don't lead nowhere. I mean—it doesn't lead anywhere."

He was beginning to be particular about his way of speech and corrected his mother's grammar.

"Oh, Em!" she cried, "after all your training, and you getting on so well!"

"There's no prospect," he told her. "Teaching is the worst paid job anywhere. What's the good of knowledge if it don't bring one a decent amount of money and some of the fun of life? This is squalor, this is. Look at you drudging your fingers to the bone in this beetle-ridden back parlour, and no comfort anywhere! All them bits of upholstery and those old mattresses make me sick at the sight of them!"

"Money's not everything," said his mother. "I'm sure we've been very 'appy, Em, in this little 'ome."

"'H-ome,' Mother," he said, "and 'h-appy.' I wish you wouldn't drop your aitches like that, when I'm teaching myself to get out of the 'abit—habit, I mean."

He leaned with his elbows on the table, staring at her with a queer, excited light in his lunimous eyes. It was after supper-time and his father had gone round to the club to talk politics with some of his friends.

"Mother," he said, "you've known what life is. The gay life, I mean, when you were a Tilley girl and on tour and all that. What made you marry a man like father—no better than a carpenter and always shabby—when you might have had a regular smart one, with lots of tin? Pretty dresses and everything! I bet you had the chance all right. You must have been jolly good-looking before you were married."

He smiled at her, staring at her poor thin face with its sharp cheek-bones and transparent skin. Every night she used to touch her cheeks with a dab of rouge, "to make herself pretty for him," as she used to say. He saw her blush very deeply and then get pale.

"Don't talk like that, Em!" she said rather breathlessly. "There's nothing in the gay life, as you call it—except misery and shame. I was glad to be respectably married. What makes you think of such things?"

"I've been thinking a lot about them," he told her. "And reading, too. H. G. Wells has been a revelation

to me. He guys our crowd and fellows like me—fellows who *remain* like me. *Kipps. Love and Mr. Lewisham. Tono Bungay.* He shows us that we ought to get out of our environment, raise ourselves higher, follow a dream. It's only a question of will power and intelligence. They don't belong by natural right to the upper classes who are mostly stupid and living on tradition. If a fellow strikes out in a new way, shapes his world like clay in his hands, there's no limit to what he can do. . . . Absolutely no limit!"

He pushed back his plate with the skin and bones of a haddock and strode about the room, which was untidy as usual and littered with his mother's tapestry and needlework.

"I'm not going to stay as a school teacher, Mother. I can tell you that straight. 'Ambition' is my motto."

"Ambition, Em? What kind of ambition? What more do you want?"

"I want purple and fine linen," he said. "I want the flesh-pots of Babylon. I want loveliness, joy, art, good music, lovely women, intellectual society, power. . . . Power! . . . And I'm going to get them, too. You watch me, Mother!"

She watched him, and was afraid. She had always been a little afraid in her heart of this boy of hers, so unlike other boys, so secretive of his inmost thoughts, even with her. She knew he had been about with some of those girls in Electric Avenue, though never once had he brought one home or spoken about them. One night when his father had come home from the Masonic Lodge he had seen Emery walking along with his arm about a girl's waist. They had stopped and kissed under a lamp-post and the girl had said: "Oh, Em, you are a one!" His father had cut down a side street and had told the boy's mother on coming home.

"Em's took up with a girl, Mother. Why can't 'e tell us straight out instead of keeping it dark as though 'e was ashamed of it? Why doesn't 'e bring 'er 'ome for a cup of tea now and then? Anyone'd thing 'e was ashamed of us, Mother!"

Now he was talking wild things about purple and fine linen, and loveliness, and power. There was a burning

light in his eyes and he laughed excitedly, as though he saw things beyond this little room. She wished she had brought him up religious. Once she had been a Catholic, but that was only when she was a little mite, before her father died, when she was eight years old. Her mother had been a bad woman without any religion, and Jago, Em's father, didn't hold with religion at all, being a Radical and a Freemason. Sometimes, while she was upholstering, she used to remember bits about that religion of hers and say the "Hail Mary" as a kind of relief to so much stitching, though she couldn't remember the end of it. There was an old Irish priest who used to teach her the catechism and give her acid tablets when she said it nicely. Lately some of it came back to her, queer things about "Holy Mother Church."

"Em," she said timidly, "do you ever think of religion? I mean God and all that? I've never been able to teach you."

"Oh, that all went out with Darwin," he said carelessly.

"Who's Darwin?" she asked. "Do you mean the man who keeps the second-hand furniture shop opposite the library?"

He roared with laughter at her ignorance, and explained that Darwin and Haeckel—that was another old Johnny—had knocked religion into a cocked hat. Science had taken its place among educated people. Of course, there were still a lot of ignorant hunks who wallowed in superstition, and some of the rich crowd thought it a good thing and supported the churches because it kept the common people tame.

His mother was silent, after a long-drawn sigh.

IV

A YEAR after the Armistice Emery gave up teaching and set up as a photographer at the corner of the Ezra Road. It was a shut-up shop—it was only later that he took the upstairs rooms—and he came home for his meals and to sleep, although he spent most of his evenings out with unknown company. Most of his business was taking photographs of Brixton girls and their sweethearts—six *cartes de visite* for six shillings—and it wasn't very profitable, so that he had to borrow money from his father whose business was not good after the war.

Later on he seemed to be doing better, and dressed in smart clothes and brought home presents for his mother. She was glad of that, until one day she went into his bedroom to look for some of his socks that wanted mending and found a lot of photographs in one of the drawers. They weren't nice photographs, thought Mrs. Jago, looking at them with her hand at her side after panting up the stairs. They were photographs of girls without any clothes on, and she put them back hurriedly with a sense of shame and fright.

That night she spoke to her son about them, nervously.

"Em, my dear, what are you doing with that photography of yours? I was looking for some of your socks——"

His face flushed angrily and he spoke to her harshly.

"What the devil do you mean prying into my private affairs, Mother? Can't you keep out of my room while I'm away? Anybody would think I was a small boy!"

"Em," said his mother, "what does it mean? All those shameless 'ussies? Undressed! I thought you was nice-minded, after all my bringing-up, and you so delicate and fond of your books."

He laughed in rather a shamefaced way and then, as he defended himself, recovered his good humour.

"It's art, Mother. Don't you understand? High art—the human form divine, beauty unadorned, and all that. There's a good market for that sort of thing among highbrow folk and connoisseurs. There's nothing bad about it, unless there's something wrong with your mind."

"But, Em! Who do you get to be took like that? They can't be good girls. It makes me feel awful to think about it."

Emery laughed at her again.

"You didn't mind showing your legs when you were a Tilley girl, Mother. It ain't for you to be so prudish."

"I never lost my modesty," said Mrs. Jago rather hotly. "I tell you, Em, I don't like it. It's—it's wicked!"

For the first time in her life she spoke crossly to him, with real anger.

"I'm making money at it," he said, and shrugged his shoulders. "You're old-fashioned, Mother, that's what you are!"

Other people were old-fashioned. The police had something to say about it, on the information of a young shop girl whom Emery had tried to persuade that she looked nicer without clothes. He decided to abandon that form of art, and became rather sulky and depressed for a time, borrowing money from his father again. It was a little later that he took up with thought-reading and discovered unusual powers within himself.

He made use of his mother again for his first experiments, just as in the old days, when he was a small boy, he had practised on her with his parlour tricks out of the *Boys' Book of Conjuring*. She was pleased at first to find him spending his evenings at home again—they two together when his father was working in the shop downstairs or round at the club for a game of dominoes. Em was her boy again, getting excited with his queer ideas, angry with her when she couldn't understand, but very kind and loving, she was sure.

"I want you to hide something, Mother, while I'm out of the room. Then give me a call, and when I come

back, think of what you've hidden and will me to find it. See ? ''

'' You are a baby, Em ! I though you'd given up them funny tricks.''

'' They're not tricks,'' he explained. '' They're mental telepathy. Thought-reading. It's a psychological phenomenon, Mother.''

She laughed at him for using such long words, trying to mystify her by his learning. But she put her needlework on one side and while he was out of the room hid her big pair of scissors under the corner of the hearthrug.

'' Come in, Em ! '' she cried.

He came in with a good-humoured smile, and she didn't wonder that those eyes of his could fascinate any girl, only she wished they were good girls instead of wicked little hussies he was ashamed to let her know. Mrs. Burnaby, the charlady, had told her things about them. Her own girl had gone with Em to the pictures before she went to the bad and was turned out by her own father who was a Christadelphian and very strict.

'' Now then, Mother, tie this scarf round my eyes so that I'm quite blindfolded.''

She did what he told her, and kissed him on the forehead when he could no longer see her.

'' You boy ! ''

'' Now then, take hold of my wrist and think of what you've hidden and will me to find it.''

'' Out loud, Em ? ''

'' Good Lord, no, Mother ! Don't you understand ? Just think inside your head that I'm going in the direction of what you've hidden. Only don't push me or pull me. You must be perfectly passive. Now just touch my wrist with your fingers. Ready ? ''

She held his wrist lightly. He jerked his head up a little, and seemed to be listening or thinking very intently.

Suddenly he moved across the room quite sharply, and while she still held onto him, stooped down, turned back a flap of the carpet, groped about for a second, and clutched the pair of scissors.

'' Is that right ? '' he asked, standing up and taking off the scarf which she had tied so tightly.

She stared at him in amazement, almost with fear.

"Well now! 'owever did you know that, Em? I believe you looked through a crack in the door or something."

"It's mental telepathy," he told her, as though that explained everything. But even he seemed surprised by the success of his experiment.

"It's queer, all the same. I felt pulled down to the carpet. Sure you didn't tug at me?"

"That I'm sure I didn't, Em."

"Well, let's try with something else. Something less obvious."

She hid a pin in a fold of tapestry tucked away behind the sofa. Blindfolded again, he found it in less than half a minute. She took off her wedding ring and put it in the vase on the mantelpiece. He went unerringly in that direction, hesitated for a second, and then tilted the vase until the ring was in the hollow of his hand.

"Em!" said Mrs. Jago. "It's frightening. It isn't natural. I can't understand it at all."

She went quite white with emotion and stared at her son as though these strange powers of his might have come from the Devil. She remembered something about the Devil going about like a roaring lion for the ruin of souls. Wasn't that something from the catechism she used to learn as a child? She was only a little comforted when he explained again that it was mental telepathy and a psychological phenomenon—though she couldn't pronounce the words without getting them all wrong, so that he jeered at her.

He tried other experiments on other evenings.

He drew a circle on a blank piece of paper and then a cross inside the circle.

"What's that for, Em?" asked Mrs. Jago. "It's not anything blasphemous, is it? That's a cross——"

She stared at the cross he had drawn as though it awakened some childish memory which stirred her deeply.

"It's auto-suggestion," he said.

He was tying her thimble to a piece of thread.

"Now, Mother," he said, "take hold of this thread and hold it in the centre of the circle, and then when you

look at the cross it will act like a pendulum, first one way and then the other in the shape of the cross."

She held the thread as he told her, and sure enough, after a few seconds the thimble began spinning round the circle and then very gradually changed its course and went backward and forward, first one way and then the other in the shape of the cross.

"Remarkable!" said Emery. "Let me have a go."

He held the thimble over the centre of the circle. Quicker than when his mother had held it the thimble started spinning round the circle.

He laughed excitedly at the success of his experiment.

"It's very queer," he said. "Mental telepathy and auto-suggestion. Why, they open out a new world. The secret of power, I wouldn't be surprised. The influence of mind over matter and all that. There's no knowing what one couldn't do with a little more knowledge of this sort of thing. I'm going to have a go at it, Mother. I believe I've got a gift that way."

"It's dangerous, Em," said Mrs. Jago. "It's morbid, that's what it is. If you take my advice, dearie, you won't touch such queer ideas. I believe they'll lead you into bad things."

He didn't take her advice. He became intensely interested in the subject of telepathy, read books on the subject at the public library, and bought second-hand volumes in the Charing Cross Road dealing with hypnotism and suggestion. One night he pretended to play a joke on his mother.

"It's another experiment," he said. "I want you to sit in front of me, Mother, and look into my eyes. Then I'm going to suggest that you go to sleep."

"But I don't want to go to sleep, Em," she said, rather fretfully. "I've all this work to do, and your father's waiting for it."

"Father can wait," he replied rather angrily. Then he coaxed her so that she couldn't refuse.

"Now you sit just here, Mother, on the old sofa, and I'll turn the light down a bit. Now I'm going to sit in front of you while you look straight into my eyes. That's it. Don't blink. I'm not going to hurt you. I want you to go to sleep. Just feel that you're very, very

tired. Your eyelids are heavy. You feel very, very drowsy. You are sinking into a deep sleep, dropping down and down into the quiet world of sleep. So sleepy, so very sleepy, little tired Mother."

She stared into his eyes. In her own there was a frightened look at first, but presently he could hear her breathing quite quietly. Her head drooped a little. There was no expression in her eyes, which were half closed.

"Mother," he said quietly, "this room is on fire. Do you smell anything burning?"

A look of fear came into his mother's face. She began to sniff and her hands twitched.

"Burning," she said in a strange far-off voice. "Smoke."

"These scissors are red-hot," he said. "Do you feel them burn you?"

He touched her hand with the cold steel of her long scissors and she gave a sharp whimper of pain and drew back her thin hand with its work-pricked fingers.

"Now I'm going to put the fire out," said Emery in a quiet voice. "It was only the carpet. The scissors are quite cold again. Quite cold, Mother."

He touched her hand with the scissors and she shivered slightly.

"When you wake up," he said, "you will feel very thirsty, Mother. Very, very thirsty. You will go into a bedroom and fill a glass of water and come back again into this room and try to drink it. But the water will smell beastly—as if it had been poisoned. You won't drink it. You will pour it away into the flower-pot on the bookcase. Now you are waking up, Mother. You don't feel sleepy any more. Wake up, Mother!"

She didn't wake up as quickly as he expected. Her head flopped sideways a little. A slight convulsive tremor passed through her. There seemed to be no blood in her face, which was dead white. Emery became faintly alarmed. He shook her and called out, "Wake up, Mother!" almost angrily.

Then she sat up and put her hand to her forehead, wearily.

"I must 'ave been asleep. I seem to remember a

dream about a fire. Something burning, and a smell of smoke."

"It was a dream, Mother," he said.

She sat up and moistened her lips with her tongue.

"I'm so thirsty, Em! I must get something to drink."

He sat there watching her, holding his breath, desperately curious to know what she would do. He felt sorry for her, this consumptive mother of his who had slaved for him, whom he loved, after all, better than anyone in the world; better than any of those rotten girls with whom he amused himself sometimes. Little sluts, as selfish as cats really, and more savage if you stroked them the wrong way—all their claws out, even against him, though he was sure of his mastery and could tame them pretty quickly with those eyes of his, just as he had hypnotized his mother, though in a different way. . . . Would she go into that bedroom as he had suggested? It was his first experiment after reading those books. It would be pretty marvellous if it succeeded. There must be something inside him, some queer power which he had long suspected, being different from other fellows ever since a boy.

He knew that his own lips were dry from excitement, and he licked them with his tongue. His mother spoke again in a dazed way, as though she had a headache still.

"I must drink some water, Em. I feel that queer. Didn't I fall asleep just now?"

He didn't answer her, but sat there staring at her across the half-lit room with the gaslight turned down.

She passed into the bedroom. He heard her filling a glass from the water-bottle on the washstand. She came out again and put it to her lips. Would she drink it? No, a look of disgust came into her face. She sniffed at the water and made a grimace.

"It smells queer," she said, "unless it's my fancy. Must be stale or something. I don't want to get poisoned."

She crossed over to the bookcase and tipped the water into a flower-pot with a withered fern standing on the top shelf.

"Funny! I think I'll make myself a cup of tea."

"Yes, do, Mother," he said quietly. "I'll help you."

He spoke calmly, but there was a sense of excitement in his brain.

"I'm a hypnotist," he said to himself. "I've a power that might lead me anywhere. I might be a miracle worker if I liked. This suggestion business has no limit. It's the power of the mind over the body. Auto-suggestion and hetero-suggestion, that's what the psychologists call it. If I can make Mother do things which I suggest like that, I can make other people. It's wonderful."

All the same he was a little frightened by this revelation of mental power.

He tried other experiments, after coaxing his mother again to let him put her to sleep. She cried when he asked her, but could never refuse him anything. There was nothing he couldn't do with her. One night he suggested to her that she should meet him at eight o'clock outside the public library. It was just the time when she got supper ready for his father, which she seemed to think was a kind of sacred duty, however tired she was. That was why he had chosen this time. It would be a big test, leaving that supper-table unlaid, with the kettle on the hob ready to make cocoa.

He stood under the clock of the public library at ten minutes to eight, watching the girls pass up and down as they waited for their boys to take them to the pictures. Five minutes to eight. There was no sign of his mother as he stared along the pavement where a crowd of people were queueing up for the trams.

It began to rain slightly and he was sorry for that, his mother being so delicate. Perhaps he oughtn't to have brought her so far. Still, it was for science. It was a psychological experiment and very interesting. Two minutes to eight. . . . No, she wasn't coming. There had been a counter-suggester stronger than his; those years of habit and a sense of duty. Well, he could hardly expect it. Eight o'clock, and the rain falling faster. He had come out without his overcoat and cursed himself as a fool. Might as well go back and have supper. He would try an experiment of clairvoyance. Possibly there was something even in that. He had read a book, quite serious and scientific——

Then he saw his mother. She had come out without her hat and wore nothing over her skirt and blouse. She was very wet, and her hair was in rat-tails over her thin white forehead. She came hurrying along with an anxious, searching look. Some of the passers-by turned to stare at her because she had that strange look, like a mad woman. Then she saw him and grabbed his arm.

"Is that you, Em?"

"Why, what in the world, Mother?" he cried, pretending to be surprised and hiding the pleasure in his eyes because this new experiment had succeeded so marvellously.

"Something told me to come and look for you," she said breathlessly.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "Something?"

"It was just when I was going to lay supper for your poor father. I had the kettle on the boil for the cocoa when I had a queer feeling come over me."

"What sort of a feeling, Mother?"

"It was just as though you were calling me, like you used to as a little boy when you woke up in the dark and cried out."

"How silly of you, Mother! Well, I'm blessed!"

"I couldn't even wait to put something on, though the rain was beating at the window panes. . . . Em, is anything the matter? Why am I 'ere if you're all right?"

"Everything's all right, Mother," he said cheerfully. "It was just a fancy of yours. It's working so much which puts queer ideas into your head. . . . And, I say, how wet you are! We had better take a tram back. Look, there's one. Hop in, Mother."

It was three nights later when she seemed to have caught a chill. His father came into his room when he was asleep and shook him roughly.

"Wake up, Em, can't you? Your mother's took bad. You'd better go for the doctor."

He sat up in bed and answered irritably.

"Why don't you go yourself, Father? I hate being done out of a night's sleep."

"I've got to stay with 'er," said his father. "She's bad. I tell you. You'd better get a move on."

"A touch of the flu," said Emery. "The doctor will think I'm a fool for disturbing him."

But he went and called for a doctor in the Ezra Road and came back with him in the rain. He was a young man, and sulky.

"Haven't had a clear night's sleep this week," he complained. "A hellish life for a man in a district like this. No mercy!"

But after he had come out of Mrs. Jago's room he looked grave rather than sulky.

"It's pneumonia. Both lungs affected, I should say. Must have caught a bad chill. I'll send a district nurse round. I suppose you can afford to pay?"

"Don't you worry about that," said Mr. Jago huskily. The doctor looked at Emery and seemed interested in him, seeing him in the light of the back parlour.

"Haven't I seen you in the library sometimes?" he asked good-naturedly.

"Yes," said Emery. "I read a good deal. Psychology and so on."

He could not resist that boast, even though his mother was lying so ill, and—as a nagging thought kept reminding him—through his fault, perhaps. He oughtn't to have brought her out in the rain like that.

"Interesting subject," said the doctor. "They're mostly novel readers in the library."

He turned and spoke to Emery again as they were going downstairs.

"I don't want to worry your father, but that poor mother of yours is in a bad way, I'm afraid. Double pneumonia—and a weak constitution. Perhaps you'd better send for a priest."

"A priest?"

Emery ejaculated the word with amazement. Why should he send for a priest? What on earth did he mean?

The young doctor was surprised by his astonishment.

"She's a Catholic, isn't she? She wears a little medal round her neck."

Years ago Emery had seen that medal. He remembered it now, as though it had been in a dream. He was

a small boy sitting on her knee and he had tugged at a thin chain round her neck, and a medal had jerked out from her bodice. She had said something about its being a lucky charm to keep her good. Since then he had never thought about it.

"We've no religion," he told the doctor. "Never did have. I dabble a bit in science."

"Ah!" said the doctor. He laughed quietly. "Some scientists have a simple faith in God. I'm one of them."

Standing there on the dark stairs above the upholsterer's shop Emery Jago was amazed by this confession of faith. Silly, it seemed to him. God? Why, hadn't that idea gone out with Darwin and the later fellows? He thought this doctor must be leg-pulling, and he gave a short, nervous laugh to show that he couldn't be taken in by that sort of thing.

Upstairs his mother lay dying. He couldn't hide that terrible conviction when he stood over her and saw her thin flushed face and jerky breathing. She was in a kind of coma, like one of those trances into which he had put her with his hypnotism. His father was sitting on a bedroom chair with his face in his hands sobbing harshly. Presently he left the room and Emery heard him stumbling down the stairs to the shop; probably to hide this emotion from his son in his shy, stupid way.

Emery was left alone with his mother.

The strange idea came to him that he might cure her by that power within himself. Suggestion! Hadn't he read that there's no limit to the influence of the mind over the body? And he was certain that he had queer powers within himself—vibrations or something, scientists didn't understand these things quite. He could feel them at the tips of his fingers sometimes, all tingling, going out of him. If only he made his mother believe that she was all right!

He called to her softly.

"Mother! You're all right! Just a chill, you know! You're going to be well again to-morrow. If you'd only sit up and look at me—— Mother, don't you hear me? Sit up, I say!"

He felt his face become very pale with a kind of wetness of the skin when suddenly she opened her eyes and looked at him.

"Sit up, Mother!" he said sharply. "Do as I tell you!"

She struggled for breath a little and tried to sit up in bed, but fell back again. She was staring at her son with a look of fear in her eyes, a look of terror.

"Em!" she said faintly. "Who's that standing by your side?"

He looked over his shoulder sharply, feeling afraid.

"There's nobody. Just you and me, Mother."

"I can see somebody," she said. "An ugly face. Send 'im away."

"It's one of your fancies," he told her good-naturedly. "There's nobody there, Mother. Only your Em."

"It's you," she said. "It's *your* face, Em! Ever since you did them thought-reading tricks with me I've seen something wicked in your face. It was in your eyes. They frightened me. They're not good eyes, Em; not like they used to be when you was my darling boy."

He leaned over the bed and put his arms about her.

"Mother, don't you go saying funny things like that. My eyes are just the same as they always were. I'm going to make you well. I'm going to *will* you to be well. See?"

"Em," she whispered, "'old me tight. I'm afraid."

"Silly!" he said. "What are you afraid of?"

He held out his arms to her, but suddenly she cowered back from him and gave a pitiful cry.

"Em!" she whispered. "There's that ugly face over your shoulder."

"There's no face," he answered again. "It's foolish of you, Mother."

She lay back in bed and her lips moved. He put his ear close to her lips and heard strange words which he had never heard before. It seemed like a kind of incantation. She was saying something about a woman.

"'ail Mary, full of grace,
The Lord is with thee——"

"What's that you're saying, Mother?" he asked.

She caught hold of his hand and held it tightly in her thin bony fingers, until suddenly he felt her grasp relax. There was a glassy look in her eyes. Her jerky breathing had stopped. He gave a loud frightened cry, knowing that she was dead.

V

It was not long after the death of Mrs. Jago that Emery took Belle Chubb to live with him and rented the rooms over his shop in Ezra Road.

He had been attracted by the girl when she came in one day to have some photographs of herself taken in dancing clothes, which she put on in the dressing-room out of the studio. The fluffy white frock of a Columbine showed her long thin legs and her thin chest and shoulders above her little silk corsage. That wax-doll face of hers with big blue-grey eyes and her mop of fair fluffy hair sent a thrill through his body to the tips of his fingers. He remembered that his mother had once been a dancing girl—perhaps it was that which attracted him.

"Wonderfully pretty!" he thought. "It's a pity she's on the scraggy side. Wonder why she looks so fed up. Out of a job, I wouldn't be surprised, like so many of them now that the war's over."

"Professional, missy?" he asked pleasantly.

She nodded and smiled rather miserably.

"When I get the chance. Them agents are a set of blighters. All they can say is 'Nothing doing—call to-morrow.' I used to be in the Turvey Troupe, until they went broke at Brighton."

"Stranded on the beach, eh?" said Emery with sympathetic humour. "No fun, I should say."

"Not when you have to keep a drunken pa," answered the girl, shrugging her thin shoulders. "Can't think why we get born."

"Ah!" said Emery. "That's the big mystery, isn't it? I'm trying to find out."

The girl laughed as though he were a humorist.

"Tell me when you happen to know! . . . And

look here, before you start wasting plates, I'd like to know the low-down price. I'm not getting these took for my best boy or anything like that. It's for them disgusting agents. Publicity stuff."

"That's all right," said Jago. "Professional prices. Ten—shillings for six—cabinet size, glazed and mounted."

"Ten shillings! . . . Oh, my God! Ain't you an optimist!"

"Not much more than cost price," said Emery Jago. If she hadn't been so pretty he might have flared out at her. He had taken five shillings off his usual price, just because something about her got on his sentimental side. Weak, that! He would have to guard against his softness with girls who attracted him.

"Well, I'll have to get them done, even if I have to pawn my underclothes," said the girl. "Nothing venture, nothing have, as they say."

She stood an incredibly long time on the tips of her dancing shoes, poised like a fairy, while Emery disappeared beneath his velvet cloth and focussed her before squeezing the bulb and exposing his expensive plates. She was worth taking nicely, he thought. There was a grace about her which appealed to his sense of beauty. Even her thinness had a kind of charm. Most of the girls he took were plump and heavy, with thick ankles —coarse, he thought them—and in the days when he had gone in for high art—before the police objected—it had not been easy to find the right type.

It was when he had exposed five plates and was making ready for the sixth that he saw her sway and stumble on her pointed toes as he studied her through his lens.

"Steady!" he said. "Don't you go spoiling a good plate. There's not a gale of wind blowing out there, is there?"

She fell on to the bare boards like a white bird, all crumpled up in a dead faint.

When she recovered five minutes later, she sat there on the floor and held her head down to let the blood run back. She seemed rather ashamed of herself for this exhibition.

"Sorry! I don't often make such an ijiot of myself. I didn't have no breakfast before I came out."

"And no lunch either, I should say," remarked Emery, looking at the clock which pointed to a quarter past three. "Don't you eat anything these days?"

"Oh, I'm keeping down my fat," said the girl, with a brave attempt at humour. She wiped a little cold sweat off her forehead with the back of her hand and then licked her white lips.

"I'd say a sip of brandy would do you a lot of good," said Emery.

He fetched some from the public-house at the other end of the Ezra Road and when he came back she was sitting in one of his chairs, as limp as a rag doll. One sip of brandy brought the colour back to her lips, but she wouldn't drink any more than that.

"I don't want to get bosky," she explained. "On an empty stomach a little goes a long way."

Presently she glanced up at him shyly, with a look of gratitude like a kitten saved from drowning.

"Thanks most awfully! Didn't know there were such decent sorts in the world. Men are beasts mostly, aren't they?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as that," said Emery, with a sense of self-righteousness. He was glad he had been kind to this young thing. It made him feel noble and benevolent. Not many chaps would have bought that brandy for a perfectly strange young woman. Or, if they did, they would want something for it. For a moment he wondered if he would ask for a kiss—it was strange how this girl appealed to him—but he restrained himself. It would spoil his sense of altruism, which was rather pleasant.

She was fumbling in her handbag and brought out a crumpled bit of paper which was a ten-shilling note.

"Pay in advance, I suppose?" she inquired casually.

"That's all right," said Emery quietly. "You go and get something to eat. You can pay me when you get a job. See?"

He marvelled at his own generosity. It was bad business. Still, as he had once read somewhere, "man does not live by bread alone."

The girl looked at him doubtfully, with a faint smile lurking about her lips.

"Jobs is scarce these days. Them agents——"

"Don't you fret," said Emery. "When are you coming in for the photos? They'll be ready in two days. What name shall I put in my book?"

"Belle Chubb," said the girl. "And not my fault! . . . I think of calling myself something foreign. It gives one a better chance."

"It *is* foreign," Emery told her with his superior knowledge. "'Belle' is the French for 'beautiful.' It suits you."

"Oh, come off it!"

She laughed mockingly, but her face flushed at his compliment. She went into the little dressing-room to change her clothes and Emery left her alone in there, though other girls didn't object to his company when they were making their toilet.

"That girl's unusual," he thought. "Childish. She thinks I'm a bit of a hero, too. She'd kiss my feet if I wanted her."

She came out in her shabby frock with her dancing clothes done up in a brown paper parcel.

"Thanks again!" she said. "Sorry for doing that faint. So silly, wasn't it? . . . I'll fetch them photos on Friday."

"They'll be ready," he told her.

"And if ever I get another week's wages I'll pay that ten shillings first thing," she assured him.

"That's all right," said Emery. "Here's luck!"

She fetched the photos on Friday and lingered in his shop for a little chat. She had been trapesing round to the agents again, but it was the same old tale. Nothing doing. Meanwhile her father was on the drunk again. Tried to bash her the night before because she couldn't bring home any wages. Sometimes she was afraid to go home when he was like that, especially as he jeered at her for keeping respectable. He was a beast, like most men she had met, except one or two. Considering she had kept her dad since she was twelve years old it was a bit thick, she thought, especially as he was drawing the dole week by week quite regularly, and had ever since the war, without doing a stroke of work, and not wanting to.

"What's your mother think about it?" asked Emery.

"Oh, she's past worrying," said the girl. "That's one comfort. She died when I was dancing up in Newcastle with the Turvey Troupe. Killed by worry I should say, what with father and everything. Funny thing, life. God, I should say it is! Especially for a girl like me who can't get a job."

She laughed at the comedy of life, but there were tears in her eyes which she tried to hide by blowing her nose on a ragged lace handkerchief.

Emery was thoughtful. He glanced at the girl once or twice and liked the look of her more and more. She was uncommonly attractive. And had spirit, too. He liked the pluck with which she faced life. He liked her thinness, those long legs of hers and her thin body and arms. He would like to kiss her on the lips and make love to her. She was different from the other girls he knew. And he had an idea at the back of his mind that she would make a good partner to the rather vague ambitions that were stirring in him. Those queer powers of his—he ought to do something about them. Lately he had been going to séances and getting rather deep into spiritualistic phenomena. There was a lot in it. It opened up all kinds of possibilities—more promising than photography in Brixton. With a good partner, pretty and attractive, sensitive and psychic, he might start in a quiet way and go on to big things.

"Look here," he said quietly, "how would you like a job as my assistant? Thirty shillings a week and a furnished bedroom free of rent. Rather interesting work, and not too hard."

She looked up with incredulous eyes.

"Are you being funny, Mr. Jago?"

He told her he was dead serious. She could do the developing and mounting and save him a lot of time which he wanted for a hobby of his, which was reading and studying.

Perhaps for the first time she suspected him, because of her long experience of life and men in cheap lodging-houses, in agents' offices, in the lowest class of variety shows.

"If you're not teasing, Mr. Jago, I'd like to have a

try. It sounds wonderful. But of course I couldn't live here altogether. People would start talking."

Emery Jago thought that a silly idea. Supposing people did talk. How would that hurt? He had made up his mind that if anyone wanted to get on in the world the first maxim of life was not to worry at all about what people thought or said. People were asinine. Mostly fools, according to Carlyle. That was a great writer he had come across. He had written a book called *Heroes and Hero Worship*. Great stuff!

"You'd better use that room upstairs," he urged. "It will keep you away from that beery old father of yours and save you rent. It's going begging."

"No," said Belle very firmly. "I'll come from nine to six, if that suits you, Mr. Jago."

VI

That was the arrangement. It lasted for two months, during which time Belle learned all the technique of photography and was very neat and quick. He liked to have her about the shop. She sang little songs when there were no customers about and while she was mounting photographs, and sometimes she pirouetted across the floor on the tips of her toes as she had learned to do in the dancing schools. She was happy to be there; he could see that, although now and again he caught her looking at him furtively, as though she was wondering about him and was not quite sure.

Sometimes their hands touched when he passed her the paste-pot or the scissors, and each time it was as though this contact made an electric spark.

"Vibrations," he thought, following a line of reading on which he was engaged. "Psychic sympathy. Energy, perhaps electrical, passing between her body and mine, or her mind and mine. I believe she and I are hypersensitive, and in tune with each other like wireless."

He tried her with some of his thought-reading tricks, which she thought very funny until one day, like his mother, she was a bit scared by his uncanny gifts.

She pretended to be sceptical at first and peered at him.

"It's just conjuring, Mr. Jago. You can't make me believe it ain't a trick! I knew a fellow once who had a girl that he blindfolded on the stage while he asked the audience to give him anything in their pockets, like a watch or a tram ticket. Then he would hold them up and say, 'What's this pretty thing?' or 'What do you think I have in my hand now?' and the girl could always tell him. Wonderful, I thought. Nobody could guess

how he did it. But he told us one night it was just a trick—what he called ' code words,' so that when he said something like ' What's this pretty thing ? ' it meant a watch."

" That's a stale old trick," said Jago laughing. " What I'm doing is quite different. It's mental telepathy. It's thought waves passing between my mind and yours. Now you just stand over there and shut your eyes. Don't think of anything at all until you feel inclined to do something. I'm going to will you to do something. And I'll write it down on a bit of paper first so you'll know what I wanted you to do after you've done it. See ? "

It seemed an amusing way of wasting time when there were no customers in the shop. Belle Chubb thought Mr. Jago a very funny young man, and wonderfully kind to her. Only she wished sometimes that his beautiful eyes didn't stare at her in a way that made her feel very uncomfortable. She shut her eyes while he scribbled something on a bit of paper.

" Now just make your mind a blank," he said in a tone of command. " Don't think of anything at all."

" But I can't help thinking ! " cried Belle Chubb. " I always was a thoughtful young thing, with a mind like a mouse in a trap. You've no idea ! "

She gave a squeal of mirth at the absurdity of standing there with her eyes shut while this employer of hers sat in a chair on the other side of the studio with his knees tucked up, and his elbows on his knees, and his chin on his hands, looking at her intently with those wonderful eyes of his.

" Be serious ! " he said, rather impatiently. " This is scientific. It's not just a game."

" Oh, I thought it was, Mr. Jago."

She opened her eyes to smile at him. But when she saw him looking cross she shut them again and tried to go to sleep in her mind just to please him. Then suddenly she felt that she wanted to move across the floor towards him. She seemed to be pulled in his direction. She found herself quite close to him when she stopped. What did he want her to do ? . . .

. . . She bent down and kissed him on the forehead.

"Oh!" she cried, dismayed with herself. "Mr. Jago! Please forgive me—I'd no idea!"

Her pale face flushed painfully. She was very much upset by what she had done, until he sprang up from his chair with laughing triumph and pulled out of his waistcoat pocket the slip of paper on which he had scribbled some words.

"There you are!" he said. "What did I tell you?"

She stared at the words written down.

"Kiss me on the forehead."

Then she was very angry.

"You'd no right to make me do such a thing, Mr. Jago. I think it's caddish of you. I've a good mind not to come here any more."

She burst into tears and sobbed out something about "making a damn little fool of me" and "playing monkey tricks."

He soothed her down and explained that it was just a scientific experiment, without any harm in it.

"The fact is," he said presently, when he had made her smile again after she had dabbed her eyes with her torn handkerchief, "there's a vibrational sympathy between you and me, Belle. You're sensitive to my psychic energy. I believe you and me could do some remarkable things if we put our heads together."

Even now in moments of excitement he forgot his grammar, though he was careful to speak correctly as a rule, and studied the masters of English prose with a nice sense of style.

It was not until a week later that he persuaded her to let him put her into a hypnotic trance. She fought against his will-power like a frightened bird until he calmed her down and told her that it was just like going to sleep, that there was no harm in it, and that she could trust him not to hurt her in any way. She went off suddenly after he had fixed her with his eyes and made his usual suggestions for going into the silence. Her head fell back over the rail of the chair, so that he could see her long thin neck. Her arms were limp at her side. She breathed quietly but heavily.

For a few minutes he stood looking at her. He was aware that he was excited, and that his heart was jumping jerkily. He hoped to goodness no one would come into the shop while this girl was under his influence like this. Hardly likely just before closing time.

"Belle," he said quietly, "you're in love with Em Jago. You know that—don't you?—though you've tried to hide it from yourself. You love him very dearly. This evening when you go home you will feel an irresistible desire to come back to him. At nine o'clock you will put on your hat and come back to the studio. When he opens the door you will hold out your arms to him and say, 'I want to stay with you, Em. For ever and ever.' Don't forget that, will you? At nine o'clock you'll come back. At nine o'clock you'll come back."

He spoke to her of love. He told her that she loved him with a very great passion. She needn't be frightened of him. He was going to be very kind to her. And she wanted to stay with him and help him. She would come back at nine o'clock and hold out her arms to him when he opened the door.

Over and over again he repeated this suggestion, until he was startled by a small boy who opened the shop door and made the bell ring and then ran away—the little devil.

He called to her, gently.

"Belle! Wake up! You've been asleep. Wake up, my dear!"

He shook her by the shoulders and then patted her hands.

"Oh, lor'!" she cried with a little whimper.

Then she sat up and put her hands to her forehead.

"I must have had forty winks. My head aches something awful. Mr. Jago—Em—what have you been doing with me? Didn't you make me go off? It was when you made me look into your eyes like that. I—I didn't want to. . . . Oh, Mr. Jago, I want to keep respectable. I want to be a good girl. Sometimes you make me—scared."

He soothed her down, laughed at her, avoided her eyes so that she should not see the burning light in his own.

"It's closing time," he said. "You go back and lie

down a bit. You're not looking well, little girl. And as for being a good girl, you always have been and you always will be. You needn't be scared about that."

She put on the little cloche hat which made her look so smart, he thought. He noticed that her fingers fumbled with it and were white at the tips. Her lips were pressed together as though she were half inclined to cry again. While he was tidying up some mounts and prints she slipped out of the shop without her usual "Good evening, Mr. Jago! See you to-morrow."

It was three hours until nine o'clock. Emery Jago cooked himself two eggs over the gas stove and had his supper. After that he smoked so many cigarettes that his nerves were jangled. His own shadow on the wall made him start. He had been getting nervous ever since he had been going to spiritualistic séances. Sometimes at night he hadn't the pluck to put the light out and got into a blue funk because he heard queer creaks on the back stairs, and once he sat up with his hair on end when a sudden draught blew open the bedroom door. It was very absurd, because he was quite certain that the whole thing—or nearly the whole thing—was fraudulent. Nine-tenths of it, anyway. Those mediums he had been visiting—some of them were idiotic. These people duped their audiences with the simplest tricks which he had learned out of the *Boys' Book of Conjuring*, and they did them clumsily, too. Perhaps there was an element of truth mixed up with all this fraud. He couldn't get the secret of some spirit photographs he had seen. And some of the automatic writing produced by these women was rather remarkable. A good deal of it perhaps was just subconscious stuff surging up in people's minds when they were self-hypnotized. But perhaps it wasn't *all* that. Perhaps now and then a spirit took control. He had seen a materialized spirit at a séance in Camberwell. It moved about the room, touched him on the forehead. He had come to the conclusion that it was a fake—easily done in the darkness—but at the time it had given him a scare. That was because of his nervous temperament. He ought to take more fresh air and exercise. . . . .

Eight o'clock. He wondered if Belle would come.

There was no fake about the hypnotic suggestion. It was scientifically proved. He had proved it himself with his mother, poor soul. That night when she came to the public library in the rain! Well, it wasn't his fault that the rain had come.

He had a good mind to start in as a spiritualist with Belle. There was a lot of money in this medium business. After the war many mothers were searching for their dead sons, trying to get in touch, ready to pay anything to a medium who could produce results. Well, it comforted them, fake or no fake. It gave them a sense of spirituality. And after all it wasn't *all* fake.

No, he couldn't go as far as that. If he set up with Belle they would do thought-reading and automatic writing and try their hands at clairvoyance. One needn't fake too much—perhaps not at all. Just a few simple tricks to get people into a right state of mind by auto-suggestion, and then leave the rest to what came through. If anybody could get into touch with the spirit world he could, that was certain. He was hypersensitive—like an æolian harp to mysterious vibrations. He could feel when people were looking at him, as though he had eyes at the back of his head. Sometimes he had a peculiar awareness of other-worldliness—outside himself, as it were—a sense of elation as though he were liberated from his body. There was something in his eyes which went out to people. He could make women in restaurants turn their heads quite suddenly if he looked at them from a distance. He believed he was clairvoyant, in a way. Several times he had seen his mother standing at the foot of his bed and looking at him with sad eyes, reproachfully. Well, it wasn't his fault it had started raining that night. . . . He was frightfully scared, of course, and he wished to goodness he didn't see such things. Perhaps it was only an illusion—nerves—due to cigarette-smoking and an unhealthy life and too much reading of queer books. All the same, it proved that he was an unusual sort of fellow. He might as well make use of his gifts. Mrs. Laveray was making six hundred a year as a medium. "You're a psychic. You're one of us, dearie," she had said. It had put the idea into his head. . . .

A quarter to nine. . . . It would make him look rather a fool if Belle didn't come. Perhaps she wouldn't turn up in the morning—or ever again. He had frightened her, poor kid. Rather a shame. Only he didn't mean her any harm. He wanted her to share his future luck. Mrs. Laveray had told his fortune by the crystal. He was going to have a lot of luck, she told him, surrounded by rich people, living in luxury. Fame was coming to him. She saw a picture of him in the crystal standing before a great audience. And there was a lady with bronze-coloured hair: a great lady with a glint of diamonds about her throat. He was making love to her. Their hands were clasped. It was going to happen some time in the future. . . . Of course, Mrs. Laveray might be faking, like so many others, but somehow she impressed him. . . . Nine o'clock.

He heard footsteps outside the shop. The shutters were up, and he had locked the door. Someone was ringing the bell. He rose from his chair and stood listening intently. Perhaps he had only imagined that ringing. Too many cigarettes and his nerves all jangled! No, the bell had rung all right! Belle Chubb! Yes, he could see her there through the door as clearly as though it were wide open and in full daylight, a slim, frightened figure in a cloche hat and a cheap jacket above her short frock and long stockings of imitation silk.

Slowly he went to the door and opened it.

Belle was there exactly as he had seen her by a mental image.

"Is that you, Belle? Anything you want?"

She faltered into his narrow hall and stood there under the gas-jet which was just a tiny flame.

"Oh, Mr. Jago! . . . Oh, Em! . . . I had to come back. . . . I don't know what's happened. . . . I feel that queer!"

He took her hands and drew her further into the hall.

"I've been calling you," he said quietly. "My love has been calling you. Don't you understand?"

Her hands faltered up and clung to him.

"Oh, Em!" she cried. "I'm afraid. . . . It's not good!" She wept miserably, clasping him about the neck.

"It's perfectly good," he said. "You and I are meant for each other, little girl. It's psychic, that's what it is. We can't help ourselves."

He kissed her lips and throat.

"My little Belle," he said huskily, because of his emotion. "Belle—French for 'beautiful'!"

That night was the beginning of their partnership.

VII

It was Mrs. Laveray from whom Jago obtained his initiation into the mysteries of mediumship. She was a remarkable woman with a very considerable knowledge of occult matters, having been a Theosophist in India when her late husband was a sergeant-major in the Norfolk Regiment. She believed herself to be the reincarnation of Queen Elizabeth and occasionally she was possessed by her " Guru," the Earl of Leicester, who was now a reformed character. She talked a good deal about a thing called " Karma " which seemed to be the same thing as life, and she was always struggling to reach a state of Nirvana which she could attain temporarily when she fell into a trancelike state and gave utterance in a deep bass voice to very beautiful but mysterious words which afterwards she said had been revealed to her by Vishnu. She could also get into touch with many young spirits which had recently passed over, and had great gifts of clairvoyance which interested Jago most of all.

It was shortly before his partnership with Belle that Emery attended one of Mrs. Laveray's séances. She charged him half a guinea, which he grudged, but afterwards he thought he had had his money's worth. The same old tricks, he thought, when he was first shown into the back parlour of a small house in a back street in Camberwell. An invisible musical-box was playing in the darkened room and about a dozen people, mostly women, were sitting in a circle and holding hands, with their feet tucked in under their chairs. Mrs. Laveray was already in a trance-like state when he entered, rather late, but she had sufficient touch with reality to speak to him.

"Join the circle, dearie."

He sat down in a vacant chair and found his hand clasped on one side by an elderly woman whose own hand was moist and clammy, and on the other by a middle-aged man with bony fingers. At first the room seemed impenetrably dark, but when he had blinked for a few minutes he could see the company. Two of them were ladies rather fashionably dressed and elegant thought Jago. Once or twice they whispered to each other. There was a bald-headed, clean-shaven man who looked like a schoolmaster because of his high forehead and pince-nez. The others were the sort of people who passed Jago's shop every day, shabby, worn-looking, middle-aged women who spent their afternoons at the movies, and a hospital nurse in a blue cloak, sitting very still, with vague watery eyes. The elderly man who clasped his right hand with bony fingers seemed to be a ship's captain because of his pointed beard and reefer jacket. He smelled of coarse tobacco.

Mrs. Laveray sat alone beyond the circle in a low chair covered with red plush. She was a stout woman, about fifty, Emery imagined, in a black silk dress with short sleeves. She wore her hair cut like a man's and had a powerful face with a double chin and heavy eyebrows. She seemed to be reciting something in a deep monotonous voice, and occasionally she broke into a strange, outlandish tongue which was Hindustani, according to the man on Jago's right—the ship's captain—who whispered this information solemnly.

"Nirvana is the absolute kingdom of happiness," said Mrs. Laveray. "It can only be reached by great striving, by noble thoughts, by freedom from Karma. It is the triumph over sin and selfishness, the putting away of flesh and its iniquities."

Emery Jago could not resist the idea that Mrs. Laveray had a lot of flesh to put away. But he was impressed. This Oriental stuff was new to him. And it sounded rather well.

"I search for my eternal Guru," said Mrs. Laveray. "My lover! My beautiful one! I shall have no happiness, no peace for my restless bosom, no tranquillity, until I hear the voice of my beloved speaking

from the Everlasting Joy. It is the voice of the Universal Love which is revealed in the tiny leaf, in the water drop, in the raging torrent, in the tiger's eyes, in the cat that crouches after the timid mouse, in the poet's songs, in the cry of little children, in the sun, and in the stars. Oh, my Guru, my Guru!"

Mrs. Lavaray seemed to be struggling to escape from the prison house of her body. She twisted about in her plush-covered chair. She uttered strange moans. She gasped heavily.

Jago felt the warm clammy hand which clasped him on the left vibrate with a sudden emotional storm.

"A young man is trying to speak through me," said Mrs. Laveray faintly. "Such a nice-looking boy. I see his spirit-face hovering above my brow. He is in uniform—torn and bloodstained. I smell blood—stale blood. . . . Yes, darling, what do you want to say? I'm trying to help you. You can't get through, you say? Oh, yes, you can if you trust your Aunty."

Mrs. Laveray gasped again, clutched her throat with her fat fingers, writhed again in her plush-covered chair. Then suddenly she was very quiet, and out of her silence in the dark room came the sound of a different voice, young and boyish.

"Is that you, Mother? I'm Jack. Your boy who was killed in the war. Speak to me, Mother!"

Emery Jago could hear the thrill pass through all the human bodies about him. It was like an electric shock. The woman holding on to his left hand with a damp clutch gave a little moan, and then whispered some pitiful words:

"I had a son called Jack. Killed in Flanders."

"Speak to him, dearie," said Mrs. Laveray in her natural voice,

"Oh, my dear!" cried the mother of the dead son. Jago turned his head and saw her thin pale face twisted by emotion. Her eyes were glistening with a rush of tears.

"Don't you worry about me, Mother," said the young voice. "I'm all right over here. As happy as a sand-boy. Many of my comrades are here—such a crowd of the lads. Tom and 'Erb and young Arthur and

Bert. Do you remember Bert? I think there's someone here belonging to him."

The hospital nurse spoke very quietly, in a voice that trembled.

"I had a brother named Bert. He was missing after the Armistice."

"That's the fellow," said the voice. "Young Bert. He had a sister who was a hospital nurse. He used to show me her photograph. She had sandy hair if I remember rightly."

Jago looked at the hospital nurse who had mentioned her brother Bert. Because of the darkness he couldn't be sure that she had sandy hair. But it looked reddish.

"That's clever," he thought. "If it isn't true, it's clever."

Bert was just the same as ever, it seemed—merry and bright. When he first came over he had been glum because his people couldn't find him. "Missing," the War Office said. He had been blown up by a German shell. There was nothing left of his earthbound body. He wanted to tell his sister and others that he was always thinking of them. Sometimes he had seen his sister in a long, shining ward, nursing sick folk—or was it children? He couldn't be quite sure. Anyhow, she was doing beautiful work. She would be rewarded for it.

Jago saw the hospital nurse touch her lips with a pocket handkerchief. Her eyes were shining in that darkened room. Then young Jack began to speak to his mother again—that woman next to him who was trembling in every limb but still kept his hand clasped. He spoke of his nursery days when she had held him on her knee tight against her breast. She used to tell him fairy tales. He remembered some of them now. There were real fairies where he was—shining little creatures who had never been on earth. Funny little beggars!

"I must remember that," thought Jago. "That's a pretty idea. No one can say it isn't true. Very likely it is!"

That boy Jack, speaking through the voice of Mrs. Laveray, mentioned a boy who had died at sea. Submarined. A quiet young fellow and very smart. His parents were still on earth, in the neighbourhood of

Camberwell. He'd like to get a message through. He was going to speak now.

Jago looked round the room. For a moment no one seemed to claim this seafaring boy who had been submarined, until the man next to him spoke huskily.

"Is that you, Bill, my boy?"

Another voice, different from the first, answered cheerfully, "Hullo, Dad!"

The seafaring man looked round the dark room and cleared his throat huskily. Jago could feel the right grip of his bony fingers.

"Look 'ere, now. I suppose I ain't 'aving my leg pulled?" he asked suspiciously. "If I thought there was any monkey tricks——"

"It's all right, Dad," said the voice. "No kidding! Do you remember the time I was torpedoed by the German submarine? I went down ever so far under the sea. All among the fishes and the seaweed. It was my soul came up after the third time. It was like flying, light as air. I thought, 'Poor old Dad would be surprised to see me now!'"

The seafaring man spat softly on the bare boards between his feet.

"It was the D-18," he said to Emery. "Went down like a stone after being 'it by a torpedo from the German cruiser."

"That's it, Dad," said the spirit voice. "The jolly old D-18, and as nice a crew of boys as ever I saw."

"That's like my boy Bill," said the seafaring man emotionally. "Always cheerful and pleased with his company."

He spoke louder into the darkened room.

"Do you get any baccy up there, Bill? I couldn't imagine 'Eaven without a plug of Capstan!"

"Good Lord, yes, Dad," said the spirit voice. "There's always baccy for them as likes it. Wonderful stuff. Cool and sweet. You've no idea!"

"Well, that's a comfort," said the man. "After learning the 'abit——"

He exchanged a few more words with that boy's voice before Mrs. Laveray was seized with a kind of convulsion and gradually awakened to her normal self.

"Well, I hope you're satisfied, dearies," she said good-naturedly. "I've done my best for you. Them young spirits have been tearing at me—that eager to get through to you."

"Wonderful, ma'am," said the seafaring man, "I must say. We're all grateful to you, I'm sure."

"Oh, Mrs. Laveray," said the hospital nurse nervously, almost hysterically, "is it true? It seems too good to be true. My dear brother——"

Mrs. Laveray gazed at her sternly.

"Haven't you any faith, my dear?" she asked. "Don't you know that without faith and unless you become even as a little child you shall not enter the Kingdom of 'Eaven? And what is the Kingdom of 'Eaven? Answer me that!"

The nurse did not commit herself to an answer.

"It's Nirvana," said Mrs. Laveray. "After you've got through Karma you enter Nirvana. But not all at once. Those who pass over go from plane to plane until they reach the final ecstasy of everlasting joy and the scented garden where beauty never dies."

"What's the matter with them pictures?" asked the seafaring man suddenly, with a sharp fear in his voice.

"The pictures, dearie?" asked Mrs. Laveray, as though much surprised by this question. Jago looked at the pictures on the walls. Everybody was looking at them, and certainly they were behaving strangely. The portrait of a stout gentleman with side whiskers—possibly Mrs. Laveray's father—suddenly changed places with the faded photograph of a sergeant-major—probably Mrs. Laveray's late husband. The coloured print of a little girl with a dog suddenly seemed to pop out of its frame and change places with a picture of Queen Victoria in her coronation robes, cut from an old copy of the *Graphic*.

"It's those naughty spirits!" said Mrs. Laveray. "Up to their games again. They tease me something awful when they're in a larky mood."

Emery Jago felt the sensation known as goose-flesh. For the life of him he couldn't resist this symptom of fear. The dimly lit room had set all his nerves quivering.

The tense atmosphere, the nervousness of the other people touched his sensitive temperament.

"It's all humbug," he said to himself reassuringly. "It's one of the old woman's tricks. I wonder how she works it."

And yet in spite of his scepticism he was uneasy, and his nerves were all on edge. One could never be quite sure of these phenomena, whether they were supernormal or supernatural or just fakes.

"Well, now," said Mrs. Laveray, "that's the end of the séance, and if any of you like to come again and talk to your dear ones, I'll do my best for you, same as this time. I'm now going to do a bit of crystal-gazing. That's extra, you know, and quite private. Half a guinea for a separate sitting."

Only three people remained behind for the crystal-gazing. They were the two ladies fashionably dressed, who whispered to each other, and Emery Jago.

"I'll have half a guinea's worth of that," he thought. "It's a lot of money, but I might learn something."

Mrs. Laveray retired to an inner room which afterwards Jago knew to be the bathroom. The bath had been covered with a board and draped in black. There was just room for a table and two chairs, in one of which Mrs. Laveray wedged herself. But he had to take his turn while the others went first, those two ladies separately. The one left behind—a beautiful woman with an elegant figure and very nice hands with delicate, pink-tipped fingers—spoke to him when they were alone together.

"Do you believe in these things? Do you think they were really spirits who spoke?"

He answered cautiously.

"I'm keeping an open mind. Science doesn't *say* such things are impossible. There's Sir Oliver Lodge——"

"Yes," said the lady.

"The mind has queer powers," said Emery.

He liked talking to this lady. It was almost the first time he had ever spoken to one of the really first-class sort, as elegant as this. Perhaps she was the Countess of Something, or the Honourable Something Else, that he read about in novels. One day he would get as far as

her way of life and be familiar with beautiful women like this. Now he was glad to show her that he was educated and intellectual.

"There's no limit to the mastery of mind over matter," he explained. "In fact, matter doesn't exist when you analyse it right down. Only electrons or energy. As for the mind, it has strange powers outside the range of present knowledge. At least, we're only groping on the edge of things. We are aware—I mean psychologists—that the human mind has undeveloped senses and powers. Vibrations—possibly like wireless. Some people are more sensitive than others. There's mental telepathy, for instance——"

"Quite so," said the lady doubtfully.

"And if one mind can reach out to another," continued Emery, "why not one soul to another—the dead and the living, if you see my meaning?"

"Possibly," said the lady.

She dropped her eyes before his gaze as though nervous of his fixed look. She seemed relieved when the other lady came out from her private sitting with Mrs. Laveray with heightened colour and a flickering smile about her lips.

"Younger sister," thought Jago. "Caste! I wouldn't be surprised if there's something in it—blue blood and all that."

She whispered to the elder lady.

"Rather amusing!"

The other lady disappeared nervously. Emery ventured a remark to the younger one—marvellously pretty with a skin like the petals of a moss rose, velvety, with a soft, warm bloom.

"Did she tell you anything interesting?"

The young lady looked at him rather coldly and then answered, after a moment's hesitation.

"Yes. It was quite amusing. She made one or two lucky hits, I suppose."

"Anything about the future?" asked Emery.

Again the girl hesitated, and then smiled.

"The usual dark man, and so on! . . . Still, I confess she rather impressed me. If what she says in anything like the truth——"

She blushed a little and laughed.

"Marriage?" asked Emery.

The girl nodded, with that smile still about her lips.

"In rather peculiar circumstances."

Emery would have liked to question her, but something warned him not to appear too curious. She might think it bad manners. He wasn't quite sure about girls of this sort. They had a way of being haughty, he thought, thinking back to the novels he had read. "She gazed at him haughtily with a little *moue*." What on earth was a *moue*? . . . "She turned from him with a look of lofty disdain." . . . No, he wouldn't risk it.

As a matter of fact she turned her back on him and went about the room examining the pictures. Perhaps she was trying to find out how they had changed places. He wanted to do a bit of examination himself. If it was a trick it wasn't bad. Of course, it would be quite easy with a little simple mechanism. Touch a spring or something. Perhaps pull a cord and make them run along a groove. Or else have an assistant in another room just lifting them out and changing them. It seemed a silly thing, if spirits took to playing games like that. No sense in it. All the same, it had scared him.

The other lady did not take so long. She came out with a mystical light in her brown eyes.

"Well?" asked the younger one. She seemed amused.

"Vastly interesting," said the other lady. "Quite miraculous. I am becoming convinced."

She glanced nervously at Emery, and then put her hand on the other girl's arm and whispered something about "afterwards."

"Good afternoon," she said very politely to Emery.

He returned the salutation, rather too effusively, perhaps. He must make a note that people of this kind were always a little cold.

Then he went in to Mrs. Laveray.

VIII

She was there before the little table, wedged tightly in the plush-covered chair, so tightly that Emery wondered if she could get out again without the aid of a carpenter. She leaned with her bare arms on the table, which was covered with a strip of black velvet. In the middle of the velvet was a large crystal. As he came in she gave a heavy yawn as though overcome with sleep.

"Oh!" she cried. "I want a cup of tea! I'm that thirsty."

"Well, I don't suppose I'll keep you long," said Emery. "Not that I don't want my half-guinea's worth. It's a lot of money."

She looked at him under her heavy eyelids.

"It don't pay," she said. "It don't give me a decent living."

"Depends how many customers you get," said Emery. "'Clients,' I dare say you call them. It sounds better, doesn't it?"

She turned sideways a little in her chair and seemed to be looking down at his feet, so that he wondered if his boots were muddy, or whether she was looking for a cloven hoof.

"You're not a police officer, I suppose?" she asked suspiciously.

He laughed. The idea was funny.

"Do I look like one?"

She looked at his hair, which he wore rather long and brushed back, and then at his small hands.

"No," she admitted, "I can't say you do, dearie. We have to be careful, you know. Fortune-telling and all that. Wicked, all these rules and regulations. It's the honest ones they catch mostly. Not those social

amateurs with their gilded rooms in Mayfair—the dirty hussies. . . . Well now, what can I see about you ? ''

'' That's what I'm waiting to know,'' remarked Emery, who saw his half-guinea slipping away.

'' Oh ! '' she said. '' How I want that cup of tea ! ''

But she put the temptation beyond her and dug her fat elbows into the strip of black velvet on the small table in front of her and bent over the crystal with her heavy-lidded eyes.

He listened to her asthmatical breathing which piped in her bronchial tubes.

It was five minutes before she seemed to see things in that crystal.

'' I see a young man,'' she said. '' Longish hair, good-looking, small 'ands. I wouldn't be surprised if that's you . . . I see him taking up bits of paper, putting them into boxes or something. Pictures, I should say.''

'' My photos and frames,'' thought Emery. '' Pretty good that. Thought-reading, I wouldn't be surprised.''

'' I see a girl——'' said Mrs. Laveray.

'' Not unnatural,'' remarked Emery flippantly.

She looked at him with a scowl.

'' If you've come here to guy me——''

'' Not at all,'' said Emery. '' I'm serious.''

She seemed appeased and breathed heavily again.

'' It's a slim bit of a girl, with long legs. She's sitting in a chair. Or perhaps it's on a sofa. You seem to be standing over her, moving your hands about.''

'' Hypnotism,'' thought Emery. '' That's a good one, that is. This old woman is a marvel. I wonder who that girl is.''

It was before he had met Belle Chubb.

She saw other pictures. She couldn't tell whether they were past or future. It was then that she saw a lady with bronze-tinted hair and diamonds about her breast and hair. Emery was making love to her. He was surrounded by rich people watching him. He was going to be famous. A public speaker or something. Perhaps a politician. Quite likely Prime Minister or Trade Union leader Something important.

It took her some little time to see these things, and Emery sat tensely interested with his sense of personal power flattered. He wanted her to go on. He was getting value for his money. If it wasn't true, it was useful as suggestion, and he didn't deny its truth. Quite a lot of scientists admitted the possibility of clairvoyance —the mind getting outside time and space.

Suddenly Mrs. Laveray pushed away the crystal impatiently.

"If I don't get that cup of tea, I'll die!"

"Here, how about my half-guinea?" asked Emery, half humorously, half in earnest.

"That's all I'm going to see this afternoon," she told him. "And enough, too, if you ask me, young man. Prime Minister of England, or leader of a Trade Union. Isn't that worth half a guinea?"

She sat watching him with those drowsy eyes of hers, and seemed taken by his good looks.

"Them eyes of yours," she said. "They're worth a fortune to you."

He laughed with a slight sense of embarrassment.

"Glad you think well of them. All the ladies like them."

"Oh," she said, "don't you get scared. I'm not amorous. I leave that to the young hussies. . . ."

She stared at him again, and seemed startled.

"You're psychic," she said. "You could see things yourself if you wanted to, I wouldn't be surprised. I can always tell. Ever tried table-turning and all that?"

"A bit of mental telepathy now and then," confessed Emery. "A few experiments with hypnotism."

This old woman was a wonder. There was nothing she didn't know.

"Ah!" she remarked. "I thought so. Nervous, ain't you? Sensitive. Delicate as a boy, eh?"

He admitted the truth of all that. Suddenly he blurted out his secret ideas, his ambition, his belief in mysterious powers.

"Look here, Mrs. Laveray. I'm rather taken with this sort of thing. I've been studying it. Mental telepathy, hypnotic suggestion, supernormal faculties, psychic stuff. . . . I believe I could do rather well with

it. It's in me, that's what it is, and always was since I was a small boy and played conjuring tricks. I'm a photographer now at the corner of Ezra Road, Brixton. I've a jolly good mind to set up as a medium, if you'd help me with a few tips. In a business way, you know. Commission and all that. On the straight."

"I don't want no more competitors," she answered rather sullenly. "Too many already, I can tell you. All them stuck-up society females taking the bread out of my mouth."

"We'll take the bread out of *their* mouths," said Emery. "Capture their clients and make them look silly. If you and me—you and I—could go into partnership——"

Mrs. Laveray looked at him under her heavy lids and smiled at his optimism.

"What do you take me for?" she asked good-humouredly. "Do you think I'm going to give away my custom and all my little secrets to a young fellow who wants to set up for himself? No blooming fear, dearie! You don't know Aunty!"

"We could make a good thing of it," said Emery quietly, restraining his excitement. "You could give me a bit of training, teach me some of your fancy tricks——"

She flared up at him instantly.

"Tricks! What's that you're saying about tricks? Did you come here to insult me, young man?"

"Heavens, no!" said Emery. "When I say 'tricks,' I mean your methods and gifts and so forth. The way you made those pictures pop into each other's frames, for instance."

Her dark eyes looked at him searchingly.

"Yes," she said. "Them naughty spirits! Playing games with an old woman's pictures. It's a bit scaring, don't you think?"

"It's bad for the nerves," said Emery laughing. "It gave me quite a turn."

He believed, but was not quite sure, that her left eye drooped into something like a heavy wink.

"It takes a lot of time," she said, "before the spirits get familiar with one like that. Years of initiation."

"What about ectoplasm?" asked Emery. "Have you ever done a bit with that?"

She answered snappily.

"No! I don't hold with it. I set my face against it. I prefer my crystal-gazing. It don't make such a mess. Besides, it's comforting to all those poor dearies who lost their sons in the great war."

Emery Jago leaned over the table and spoke in a low voice.

"Look here," he said quietly. "Tell me straight. Is that stuff fake, or do you really see things?"

"Fake!" cried Mrs. Laveray loudly. Her face became empurpled, and with a great struggle she released herself from her chair.

"Young man, you clear out of this room before I strike you dead on the ground before me. And pay me that half-guinea before you go."

He had the half-guinea in his pocket all ready—a crumpled bit of paper and a sixpence.

"There you are," he said. "And if you think I came here to insult you, you're making a mistake. I want to know, that's all. I'm a searcher after truth."

"Well, you go and find it in the Camberwell Road," answered Mrs. Laveray sullenly. "Fake, indeed! I never heard such sauce from a young fellow."

"Sorry!" said Emery. "I hadn't the least idea of being saucy, as you call it. None whatever, Mrs. Laveray. Honour bright."

"You're keeping me from my tea," said the lady. She relented a little before he left.

"Did you say something about being a photographer? Ezra Road, Brixton?"

"That's it," said Emery. "The corner shop. Any time you'd like to call in, I'd be glad to see you and make you a cup of tea. And no charge either. A pleasure."

"Well, that's nice of you," she said quite amiably. "And don't be hard on the girls with those dark eyes of yours."

IX

Emery Jago went with Belle several times to the Caledonian Market in the north of London. It was an old haunt of his where he had picked up books on psychical subjects and haunted houses and a twopenny copy of Vale Owen's automatic writings. Now that he had set up housekeeping with Belle Chubb they wanted some odd bits of furniture for the bedrooms, such as a chest of drawers and a corner cupboard. Belle, too, who was quite practical and a very good little housekeeper when she wasn't worrying because she hadn't been properly married in church—he laughed at her for that notion. She was keen to get some things for the kitchen so that she could cook the meals nicely instead of living all the time on boiled eggs or kippered herrings or tinned stuff which was bad for Em's digestion and made him nervous.

She held his hand as they wandered about the stalls, and when he stood looking at old bits of ironmongery or turned over some tattered books—centuries old, some of them, he told her—she leaned against him with her head touching his shoulder. Some of the young fellows from the East End, marketing with their young wives, turned to look at them because of Belle's pretty face—like Dorothy Gish in *Orphans of the Storm*—and perhaps, also because of something striking in the appearance of Emery Jago, with his longish hair under a soft felt hat, and his dark, luminous eyes, and the big black bow he had taken to wearing since he had set up as an artist photographer.

"Nice-looking couple," said a young man walking with a girl, who held a baby in her arms. "Artists, I dare say. 'Resting,' as they say when they're out of a job."

Emery overheard these words—he had an unusually acute sense of hearing—and nudged Belle.

"They like the look of us, little girl! Did you hear that?"

The touch of vanity in him was flattered by this passing compliment.

"Anyone would take notice of you, Em," said Belle. "Them eyes of yours would fascinate a tame rabbit—yes, and a wild one, too."

"Don't say '*them* eyes,' Belle! It's bad grammar. 'Those eyes.' 'Them' is the accusative following a preposition. 'Give it to them.' See? One doesn't say 'them' at the beginning of a sentence."

Belle Chubb laughed rather shrilly.

"One finds it very difficult, does not one?"

She spoke like a very fine lady, mocking him, until he pinched her arm and said, "Naughty!"

Then she gave a little squeal as though he had hurt her.

"Oh, Em! Don't do that, I tell yer. I'll scream if you do it again."

"Hush!" said Emery. "Let's try and remember we're aristocrats in the Caledonian Market. We have to stroll round looking proud and haughty as though we had come up from the West End. Lord and Lady Jago, of Jago House, Belgrave Square."

She giggled and gave the game away to an old gipsy-looking woman sitting behind a stall which exhibited a card announcing: "Genuine antiques. No offer refused."

"That's right, dearie," said the woman good-naturedly. "You laugh as long as you feel like it. It's a treat to see a bit of 'appiness—everybody looking so worried after the war, in spite of the dole and everything. Bless your pretty face, I say, and may your young man be faithful and bring you luck."

Belle was rather overwhelmed by this eloquence and blushed vividly. She put her hand on Emery's arm and said, "Come on, Em!"

But Emery was interested in something that had caught his attention on the stall. He stretched out an arm and took something and held it in his hand.

"That's queer!" he said. "Fancy finding that here! We've been led to it, seems to me. I've been wondering

where on earth I could find one. And here it is, put into my hand almost. Extraordinary!"

Belle laughed at him.

"What do you want with that bit of glass, Em? Silly, I call it."

"It's not glass," he said in a low voice that had a thrill in it. "It's a crystal."

"Same thing, isn't it?" asked Belle, holding on to his arm and leaning her head against his shoulder again. This Em of hers was a funny young man. She loved him so much that it frightened her sometimes. But he was always doing queer things, and making her feel scared over and above her love for him.

"How much do you want for this crystal, Mother?" he asked the gipsy-looking woman.

"Fifteen-and-sixpence," she told him. "But I wouldn't advise you to buy it, young man. Swelp me Gord, I wouldn't, and I tell you straight, though it's bad business."

"What's the matter with it?" asked Emery in his quiet way. But his hand trembled slightly as he held the crystal up to the light from a grey sky which was leaden and sultry over the Caledonian Road that August day.

"It's unlucky," said the woman. "It's used for fortune telling and the magics. My mother was a Romany and used to do a bit in that way before I left the road and gave up being wild. I dare say that thing is thousands of years old. It gives me the jim-jams to think of all them that 'as 'andled it and tried to see their fate, poor dears!"

Emery Jago fumbled in his pocket and pulled out fifteen shillings and some coppers.

"It interests me," he confessed. "I'll have it."

Belle clutched his arm and made a protest.

"Em, I wouldn't! Fancy you being caught by a bit of glass like that. Why, I wouldn't give twopence for it!"

"It may be worth thousands of pounds to us," he told her in a whisper. "Leave go of my arm, Belle!"

He put the crystal in the side pocket of his jacket where it bulged like an apple.

"Well, I warned yer," said the gipsy woman with a shrill laugh.

Emery nodded and strolled away.

And that night in his shop at the corner of Ezra Road he sat in front of a small table which held the crystal on a strip of black velvet which he had cut from his camera cloth. On the side opposite him was Belle, with her sharp pointed elbows on the cloth, and her chin in her hands, and her fluffy hair falling over her forehead. The light was half turned down so that the room was dim. Only the crystal sparkled against the black velvet. The rays from the gas-jet above their heads seemed to play in it.

"Do you see anything?" asked Emery in a low voice. They had been there for an hour.

"Not a thing, Em. . . . Oh, I'm fed up with this silly rot. You *are* a fool, Em! Straight."

"Don't talk so much," he said, rather crossly. "Keep looking. Concentrate. Try and keep your mind a blank. . . . Now then. Hush!"

He was staring into the crystal with his dark, brooding eyes. Belle's hair touched his forehead. He could see the reflection of her eyes in the crystal. Sometimes he though he saw other things. The light moved in it like waves. It seemed to flow like water. Shadows came and passed across. Once, almost distinctly, he thought he saw a figure like a human form. Or was it a face? . . . Or—just nerves?

For five minutes more there was intense silence in that photographer's shop at the corner of Ezra Road, Brixton. From afar, and faintly, came the sound of tram-cars down Brixton High Road. A man went by whistling. Two cats began fighting and squealing and then departed as the heavy tread of a policeman passed. The tin clock on the shelf above the camera which was packed away for the night gave a sharp metallic tick which exaggerated the quietude of this room where Emery Jago and Belle Chubb were sitting with their foreheads almost touching over that glittering ball on the black cloth.

"Em!" said Belle in a whisper.

"What?" he asked, whispering also. "Do you see anything?"

"Something's forming," she said. "It's like faces and bodies. . . . I feel afraid."

"Keep on looking," he urged, "for God's sake!"

His voice shook. His hands were trembling as they were clasped beneath his chin. He felt an immense strain upon him, as though all his strength were passing from his body into that crystal.

"Oh, Em!"

Belle thrust herself back from the table and gave a shrill scream and covered her eyes.

The crystal slipped on the velvet cloth towards Emery.

"What did you see!" he asked hoarsely. "What is it?"

For several seconds she held her hands against her eyes. Her face was very white.

"Em!" she said when she looked at him again with fear in her eyes. "It was you! I thought I saw you. You had a woman in your arms. She was in evening dress, like one sees in the picture papers. You were trying to kiss her. I could see your face. Your eyes were on fire, Em. I couldn't bear the sight of it. I won't never look in that damn' thing again."

She burst into tears and came round and clung to him, kneeling on the floor by his side.

"Em, if you ever love any other girl, I'll kill myself. I swear to God I will. . . . Why don't you marry me, same as other girls want?"

Emery stood there with Belle holding on to him. He tried to comfort her.

"Perhaps it was you," he said, "after we get rich. In evening clothes like a grand lady."

She shook her head and sobbed . . . and something told him that it was not Belle who had appeared in that crystal. It was the same woman that Mrs. Laveray had seen with the glint of diamonds about her and bronze-tinted hair. It was his future lady.

"That crystal is going to make our fortune," he said. "Clairvoyance, and you making pots of money with rich clients. It's quite clear you've got the gift."

"No!" cried Belle sharply. "I'd rather die than stare into that damn' bit of glass. I never want to look at it again."

"Oh, yes you will," said Emery quietly, "if I want you to. You can't refuse me anything, Belle. That's because you love me, little girl. You and I are partners. We can't get outside fate. Everything's bound to happen that happens. That's certain."

In his own mind he was not absolutely certain that she had really seen him in that crystal. There was just the possibility that it was her subconsciousness at work. She was jealous of him. She was afraid that he might love some other girl. It might have been auto-suggestion, with a touch of self-hypnotism, after staring into the crystal for two hours. Still, on the whole, he was inclined to believe that it was clairvoyance—and the real thing. . . . He saw a future in it. . . . Very queer and rather attractive—that rich and lovely woman who seemed to be waiting for him.

X

It was three weeks after he had set up partnership with Belle Chubb that Emery saw the bulky framework of Mrs. Laveray squeeze through his shop door. She stood there wheezing while the bell kept on ringing.

She greeted him amiably.

"Good afternoon, dearie. Aren't you the young fellow who called on me one day?"

Emery agreed that he was that young fellow, and he was delighted to see Mrs. Laveray again. Ever since his visit he had been thinking about the things she had told him. Brooding over them, almost.

She glanced round the shop rather nervously.

"All alone by yourself?" she asked.

"As lonely as a hermit," said Emery. Belle was lying down upstairs with a sick headache. She had been staring into the crystal again. She was beginning to see things—and it was very extraordinary and rather frightening in a way. It certainly wasn't fake with Belle. She was a born clairvoyante. With a bit of practice she would hold her own in any séance.

"I've brought a little job for you, dearie," said Mrs. Laveray, after some further conversation about the weather and a murder down Camberwell way and the coming Bank Holiday. "They're photos."

"Do you want some plates printed off?" asked Emery. "I'll do them willingly, and cheap, too."

"Well," said Mrs. Laveray, coughing wheezily, "I don't know much about these things. Photography is a mystery to me. It's a little fun of mine really. Just to please some friends of mine. Perhaps it's too difficult, after all."

She opened a black handbag which she nursed on her

lap and produced four photographs. They were the photographs of young soldiers in khaki.

"Friends of mine," she remarked. "Such nice boys!"

"They look it," agreed Emery. He had taken hundreds like them—with their best girls. "But I don't see what you want me to do with them."

She explained with asthmatical laughter. It was just an idea of hers! Rather silly, but then she was sentimental. She wanted Emery to take her own picture. Just sitting there like she was now. And then, if it wasn't too difficult—she didn't understand these things—she wanted the faces of those dear boys—bless them!—taken on the same plate. Separately, of course, one boy, one plate, just above her head. Perhaps he might make it look as though they were coming out of a cloud, all vague like and nebulous.

Emery Jago was rather struck with that word "nebulous." He made a mental note of it. It was a very good word. He was also struck by Mrs. Laveray's idea.

"Nothing easier," he said, looking at her with a sideways glance. "As simple as A B C."

Mrs. Laveray was glad to hear it. She thought he must be very clever.

"Well, fire away, dearie," she said presently. "I've not much time to spare. All them clients of mine waiting for their spiritual comfort."

Jago agreed with quick sympathy.

"Quite so. They need you, I'm sure."

He disappeared beneath his velvet cloth and focussed Mrs. Laveray. She bulged at first beyond his plate and he had to move the camera back an inch or two. Through his lens she looked an even more remarkable woman—those black eyebrows and her powerful features. Rather like Danton, he thought, remembering a book of his.

He exposed four plates, and then two more for safety's sake.

"That's fine," he remarked. "Now, if you'll leave the four boys—heroes of the great war, I expect—I'll superimpose them with a little vignetting. They'll look nebulous all right."

He took the four photographs and put them in his breast pocket.

"You leave it to me, Mrs. Laveray."

She left it to him gladly. But she would be glad to know how much he was going to charge a poor old woman for a little job like that.

"Don't make it too steep, dearie."

Not at all. Emery Jago was going to charge only a nominal fee for a small job like that.

"Twenty pounds," he said, and looked into her eyes.

She gave a kind of gurgle which was like a strangled scream, and fell back in her chair.

"Twenty pounds! Have you gone mad, young man? I think five shillings would be ample. Twenty pounds! You're having your little joke with a poor old woman!"

"Oh, I'm not joking," said Emery, with a deadly calm. "I said twenty pounds, didn't I? That's not too much for faking spirit photos. And if you don't pay up and look pleasant, I'll come round and tell your clients that you're playing games with them. See? That will rather spoil your reputation, won't it?"

She pawed about with her hands like an old tabby cat clawing at a dog through the area railings.

"Oh, you dirty young devil! I'd like to tear your eyes out. You serpent in sheep's clothing! Psychic, didn't I say? Why, you're just a blackmailing toad. You ought to be crushed under a steamroller, and swep' up in the dustbin. Noxious! I'll get the spirits on to you. They'll fling you out of bed and hurl the coal-scuttle at you. They'll cover your body with sores and spoil your face for you. Wait till my Guru has a go at you. You won't know yourself when you get up in the morning, I promise you!"

"Now look here," said Emery Jago sternly, but enjoying himself a good deal because of this unexpected drama, "we may as well be friends and understand each other. I don't want to take advantage of you. But if I'm going to do spirit photos for you I want to be properly paid. They might be traced to me, and I'm not taking the risk for nothing. Besides, it's dishonest.

It's deceiving simple souls who come to you for spiritual consolation. I don't hold with it."

He felt sincere and righteous in showing this indignation.

Mrs. Laveray breathed loudly and pressed a fat hand against her bosom.

"It's a comfort to them," she said sullenly.

"That's as may be," said Emery. "All the same, it's a fake. Highly immoral and very dangerous. And what's more, I wouldn't be surprised if your whole show isn't a fake. That crystal-gazing, for instance. That lady with diamonds in her bronze-coloured hair. How am I to know if there's any truth in it, now that I've caught you out over these photos?"

"It's true," said Mrs. Laveray, with all her bronchial tubes wheezing. "May God strike me dead while I sit in this chair if I don't see pictures in the crystal."

Emery was impressed. He believed that Mrs. Laveray was telling the truth about the crystal. Clairvoyance? Yes, he believed there was something in it in spite of all his disbelief—his scepticism, anyhow—in spirit manifestations.

"What about those spirit voices?" he asked. "All those dead boys? Tom—Dick and Harry!"

Mrs. Laveray looked at him sulkily under her heavy eyelids.

"One says things. It's the subconscious, dearie. Psychics is very funny. You never can tell half the time. I believe in the spirits, and always have done since I was a young woman in India with my poor husband. . . . Of course, one puts in little bits now and then. Has to, if one wants to keep one's circle. The poor dears expect so much."

"I see," said Emery thoughtfully.

That was the explanation, undoubtedly. One put in little bits. Just like scientists fake their experiments when they have an audience. Not unreasonable, after all. A little bit of conjuring might act as a powerful suggestion and put people in the right frame of mind —create an atmosphere, so to speak. Probably every medium did a bit of that.

"I'll let you off that twenty pounds," he said. "I'll

do those photos for nothing. In a friendly way, see, between you and I."

He corrected his grammar and said "between you and me," though it always sounded wrong to him.

She was gratified. In her temperamental way—even fat people can be temperamental, thought Emery—she beamed on him, relieved from the awful thought of that blackmailing threat and the twenty pounds.

"Now that's kind of you," she said. "The first moment I saw you I thought, 'That's a handsome young fellow. Such nice eyes. Psychic, I wouldn't be surprised.'"

"After all," said Emery, not without a touch of self-deception, "it does comfort those poor souls searching for their sons and brothers."

"That's it," said Mrs. Laveray. "It comforts them. One must have spiritual consolation or else wallow in despair."

Her right eyelid drooped slightly but one could hardly accuse her of winking. It was a weakness of the lid.

"You and I understand each other, dearie. We've both got the psychic gift. If I can help you with a little advice now and then, I'd be glad. One has to learn the technique, like in all professions. Each one has his own methods. The patter, as you might call it."

"That's exactly my idea," said Emery. "If you could put me up to a few things, I'll stretch a point about those spirit photos."

She squeezed his hand.

"Reciprocity," she said. "You come round and see Aunty now and then."

"That's right," said Emery. "'Reciprocity,' and a very good word, too. I can't think how you get hold of such fine words."

"My poor husband was a scholar and a sergeant-major," said Mrs. Laveray. "I picked up some of his long words. Couldn't help it."

"I'll call round with the photos one evening," said Emery. "I'd rather like to see those pictures of yours changing places again. Very peculiar, it seemed to me."

Mrs. Laveray suspected him of scepticism.

"The spirits *are* peculiar," she insisted. "They're up to all sorts of games when they really get hold of one. Well, so long, dearie. I must be going. And I'll expect you one of these evenings."

She went, and he watched her figure passing his shop window until Belle came down and stood behind so quietly that he started violently when she put a hand on his shoulder.

"I say, I wish you wouldn't creep about like that, Belle."

She laid her face against his cheek.

"Oh, Em! Why can't we get married properly?"

"We *are* married properly. I don't hold with silly ceremonies. You know I love you, don't you? Isn't that good enough?"

"It's good as long as you love me," she said.

While she was making tea over the gas stove she asked who the woman was who had been talking such a lot. She had heard the murmur of voices while she was sleeping off her headache.

Emery told her it was Mrs. Laveray, the famous medium. She advertised in the occult papers, and had come to get some photographs taken.

He did not tell Belle Chubb that he had agreed to fake some spirit photographs. She wouldn't understand.

XI

EMERY had some trouble with Belle when he first proposed to start some séances in a professional way.

"It isn't honest," she said, having given up the habit of saying "ain't" under his tuition.

He explained to her that it was perfectly honest. It was just as honest, for instance, as it was for those people in the music-halls to pretend to do all sorts of mysterious things by means of mental telepathy. They didn't explain their tricks—if they were tricks. They gave a very interesting show and earned a lot of money and satisfied their audience. Nobody said they weren't honest.

"Yes, but Em," said Belle, "that's not the same thing. This spirit stuff is quite different. It's like making fun of religion. See what I mean, Em?"

"Who's making fun of it?" he asked sharply. "You know I believe in it. It's quite likely that now and again the spirits do communicate. You say some very strange things sometimes when you're half hypnotized. They give me the creeps. Extraordinary and inexplicable things."

"I wish you wouldn't use such long words, Em. But anyhow, I hate the whole idea. It's—it's dirty. That's what it is."

"What do you mean by 'dirty'?" he asked angrily, with a flush of colour rising to his pale face.

"Cheating," she said sturdily. "That's what I mean, Em. It's taking advantage of people. Pretending to be their dead friends and all that. Scaring them by conjuring tricks and silly nonsense. I wish you hadn't never had nothing to do with that damn' woman Mrs. Laveray. She's leading you into all this dirty muck."

Emery pushed back his hair impatiently with his small, nervous hand. Belle was beginning to try his patience. She was rather stupid—and obstinate.

"Mrs. Laveray is a kind-hearted creature," he said sullenly. "I've learned a lot from her."

That was true. Since he had obliged her about those spirit photos Mrs. Laveray had been friendly and helpful, and now her health was breaking down because of her asthma and she was going to pass on some of her clients who were getting too much for her. It was to be a business arrangement between them, on a commission basis. It was only by personal recommendation at first that one could make a start. Besides, it was very useful to learn something about the Oriental side of occultism and she had lent him books—vastly interesting—about reincarnation and Karma. She had also given him some very useful tips about other well-known mediums and was going to introduce him to one or two of them who might co-operate in a friendly way and exchange confidences about their clients. It was going to make things easier to be in the inner ring. Of course, Mrs. Laveray faked a good deal. She had confessed that frankly enough when they had become friendly. Those pictures that changed places all worked by a simple mechanical contrivance which she had made very ingeniously with some bits of wire and hairpins. "It all helps," she said. "It gets people into the right mood of sensibility. You must have sensibility before the spirits get a chance, dearie. You see that as well as I do, don't you?" He understood that perfectly. And it wasn't as if it were all fake. That was what he tried to explain to Belle.

"You must admit you see things in the crystal," he said. "After that first experiment of ours you've only got to concentrate for five minutes and you see all sorts of queer things. You're psychic to your finger-tips."

"I'm afraid of it," she said sulkily. "I wish you wouldn't ask me to do it, Em. It gives me the jim-jams."

"It's a gift," he told her sincerely.

"Besides," she said, putting her thin hand on his shoulder, "that's not so bad as when you pretend to speak with spirit voices. It seemed funny at first—made me laugh because it's so silly and comical like—but it don't seem fair. It really don't, Em."

Emery explained his ideas carefully, though he didn't

expect her to understand. "It's like this, Belle. I regard this séance stuff as being in two parts—illusion and reality. The illusion is for the sake of suggestion—to get people in the proper mood. See? Then queer things begin to happen—without a doubt. One's supernormal faculties begin to work. Spirit messages come through. Spirits themselves, I wouldn't be surprised."

"It's lying," she said. "It's cheating, mostly." Belle Chubb was utterly unconvinced by that confession of faith. "Don't do it, Em!"

"We must do it," he said gloomily. "How the devil are we going to live if we don't do it? I've told you that I'm getting into debt. This miserable photography isn't any good, and now that my old dad has passed over"—unconsciously he fell into the language of his fellow mediums—"there's not a soul to lend me a bit of money. You know that as well as I do."

All that was terribly true. Since he had taken the rooms over the shop he had lost money every week and the landlord was pressing for the rent. His father had died quite suddenly, and when all his affairs were settled there was a beggarly fifteen pounds due to Emery from the sale of the furniture. There was no profit at all in cheap photography, especially as he had been neglecting things lately to study spiritualism. Not that that worried him much. He had greater ambitions than that. That bronze-haired lady was waiting for him somewhere. Those rich people. Fame. He believed all that in spite of Mrs. Laveray's little deceptions. That crystal-gazing was true. It was confirmed by Belle herself. There were other things that were true—his own mysterious powers, the vibrations that came out of him, queer messages that came from table-turning, and the planchette which he had been trying lately. It was all a mixture of truth and half truth—unknown faculties in the human body—supernormal understanding beyond the explanation of science—hidden senses revealing things not within reach of the ordinary intelligence. Wasn't he a living proof of it? He could find any hidden thing if Belle touched his wrist with the tip of her fingers. He could make people turn their heads sharply

sometimes if he willed them to when walking along the street. His power of suggestion was almost alarming. He could make Belle come to him without hypnotism, even if she were at the top of the house. It couldn't be all coincidence. He was hypersensitive and had strange premonitions, a kind of second sight. Once when there was no customer in the shop he said to Belle : " There's a woman coming down the Ezra Road with a small boy clinging to her skirt. She's coming to have his photograph taken."

" Come off it ! " cried Belle, laughing at him.

Five minutes later in the woman came, with the small boy, and looked surprised when Belle gave a shrill laugh. Coincidence ? No, he didn't believe it. He walked with a sense of life's mysteries about him. . . . And anyhow there was money—honest money—in it. Mrs. Laveray was earning six hundred a year as a medium. If a wretched old woman could do that, what couldn't he do if he once got going ? Four thousand a year if he had any luck. Yes, and more when rich women came to know him. That lady with the bronze-coloured hair !

He broke down Belle's opposition. She could never resist him for long. Her love for him made a slave of her and she couldn't bear it when he spoke sharply to her with a glint of anger, or when he wouldn't speak at all but pretended to ignore her.

" I'll do it, Em ! " she said one night, and put her arms round him and her wet face against his cheek. She had been crying, as he knew.

It was before the first séance he had arranged with some of Mrs. Laveray's clients and a few of his own customers to whom he had spoken privately.

" That's all right," he said quietly and gladly. " And don't go losing your nerve or anything, little girl. You'll be all right with a bit of practice. I'll do the spirit voices and you can act as my assistant and do the clairvoyance."

She put her arms about him and kissed him passionately.

" You know I love you, Em ! Whatever you want me to do I can't help loving you. You silly old Em ! "

She was the slave of love.

XII

BEFORE his first séance Emery was nervous. So much depended upon it. And it was a great experiment, too. It was a test of his own powers. Lately, when Belle had gone to " the pictures " in the cinema at the corner of Electric Avenue, he had locked himself in the bathroom for an hour at a time. There he sat in the darkness with the blind pulled down in order to get into a trance-like state and give the spirits a chance to take possession of him. Anyhow to see if anything happened. You never could tell. . . .

Things had happened. When he had put his mind into that blank state all sorts of queer ideas and images had come surging up. The strangest stuff. He didn't believe it all came out of his subconsciousness, though he knew the theory of all that. He saw faces in the darkness —some of them horrible and leering, others beautiful and alluring—the faces of lovely women such as he sometimes dreamed about in that half-waking state before getting up. He was obsessed with the idea of a Red Indian chief. He could see him in his Indian dress and mocassins—a hatchet-faced young man. But sometimes he was in uniform with the wings of a flying man on his chest. It was rather extraordinary, that constant appearance of this Red Indian. He remembered reading an article about the man in an American magazine. He was a full-blooded chief named Black Eagle who had served in the Canadian air force during the war and had been killed during the battles in Flanders. The article had been illustrated by photographs and drawings. No doubt it had made an impression on his mind for some reason—perhaps because

he had loved Red Indian stories as a small boy. But why should this figure always take possession of his mind when he sat alone in the darkness trying to get into touch with—well, with anything that might happen ? Then, sometimes, he had seen—it was almost like seeing—a little girl in a white frock with a ring of daisies round her hair. Perhaps that also was some childish memory. He may have seen her when he was a small boy on Clapham Common or on the grass at Tooting. He had read a bit of Freud and knew that such memories persisted in the subconscious mind where everything is stored up—every impression of childhood. But it was just as if he *saw* her, and curiously enough, he was certain that her name was Elsie. Why Elsie ? Why not Alice or Gwendoline or any other girl's name ? It gave him quite a start afterwards when Belle mentioned quite casually that she had had a sister called Elsie who had died as a child.

" Have you ever told me that before ? " he asked in a startled voice, so that Belle wondered at his excitement.

" Not as I know of," she answered. " Of course, I may have done. Why, Em ? "

" I believe I've seen her," he said gravely.

" Come off it ! " cried Belle. " Where, I'd like to know ? "

" In the bathroom," he told her solemnly. " In the darkness. More than once, too, with a daisy chain round her hair."

Belle looked at him curiously and then gave a shrill laugh.

" You're getting balmy, Em ? You'll go off your nut if you're not careful."

Certainly his nerves were jangled. It was the strain of preparing for his first séance. There was a lot to do in arranging the upstairs rooms. He took away the folding-doors and Belle made a pair of black velvet curtains which together they hung up on a brass rod which they had bought in the Caledonian Road.

Belle had changed her mood after her surrender to his plans. She made a mockery of the whole business and gave squeals of laughter for no definite reason, as though she had gone silly. She refused to let him put

her under hypnotic influence and said if she wanted any spirit voices she could do the trick better when she had her wits about her.

One night she played a joke on him, pretending to go off in a trance and then speaking all sorts of things in different voices. She did a coster to the life with a coarse Cockney accent, and then suddenly began to speak in the voice of a little girl in a high, childish treble.

Emery was utterly startled, believing that she was quite hypnotized, until suddenly she sat up and said: "Silly, aren't you?" with a shriek of laughter.

"Do you mean to say you were shamming?" asked Emery.

"You silly old Em! Anyone could take *you* in!"

He was thoughtful after that. It shook him rather.

"You did that coster very well," he remarked. "Marvellous, to be quite honest."

He stared at her suspiciously.

"Sure you were faking all the time?"

"Up to the neck!" said Belle. "And if you want a society girl or a young toff I can do them better than Mrs. Laveray or any of your silly old mediums."

She pretended to go in a trance again and spoke like a young gentleman of the West End, pronouncing her aitches carefully and making only one mistake in grammar.

"How's that for Oxford?" she asked. "I knew a boy once——"

She did not dilate on that reminiscence but looked at Emery with mischievous eyes.

"If I go into this business," she said, "I'm going into it as a funny game. I'd go balmy if I took it serious."

Emery was thoughtful. Belle's exhibition of mimicry revealed a new aspect of her character. It was also, he admitted to himself, a temptation, in case the spirits failed.

"You're a wonderful little actress," he told her. "Still, it's dangerous, you know. We've got to take this thing seriously. Without levity."

"Without humbug," said Belle, mocking at his

gravity. "What about that gramophone, Em? Do be honest with yourself."

His face flushed for a moment, but he answered seriously.

"It's the illusion part. Stage effects to create an atmosphere."

"Oh, stow it, Em!" laughed Belle Chubb, in her childish way. He had done a bit of carpentering work in the room upstairs. He had taken up one of the floor-boards and made a little square compartment into which the gramophone just fitted. When the board was laid down again no one would suspect that anything was hidden underneath. By pulling a thin bit of wire and releasing a spring fixed to the starter he could set the gramophone going. He had another contrivance in the ceiling which would enable him to rattle a tambourine by pulling a bit of black cotton which came through a loop in the velvet curtains. People would be fools if they imagined these musical instruments were played by spirits. He didn't intend them to think so. But it would create a mental atmosphere. Later on he might do that picture trick which was Mrs. Laveray's speciality, and other things which he would keep dark from Belle because she didn't understand the difference between illusion and reality.

On the night of the séance, which was a Monday evening, he was pretty sure of about a dozen clients. Mrs. Laveray had given him a list of people she had recommended to visit him that evening. At least her spirit control—the Guru as she called him—had mentioned his address and said nice things about him. It was almost certain that Lady Ardington would turn up. She had an insatiable desire to get in touch with the spirit world and hunted up every new medium. She was Mrs. Laveray's chief asset and very valuable because she encouraged other people of her own class.

"I 'ardly like passing 'er on," said Mrs. Laveray, "but my asthma is that awful, and I trust you about the commission, dearie."

Lady Ardington's first husband had died in India and she had had a lover who had been drowned on the *Lusitania*. He was a literary gentleman named Freckles

—that was his nickname as Mrs. Laveray had found out from Lady Ardington's maid who had come for the crystal-gazing one day.

"It's useful to know a few things like that," explained Mrs. Laveray. "It helps the spirits to get a link with human souls, poor dears."

Then there was the hospital nurse whose brother Bert had been killed in the war. She might come if she were not on night duty that evening. If so she would bring a friend who worked in a milliner's shop in Knightsbridge and was a young widow with two children. Her husband had committed suicide by pasting up the windows of his bedroom and turning on the gas after trying to get work as an ex-officer, like so many more. The hospital nurse had told her all that, hoping that Mrs. Laveray could give her friend some comfort, poor thing. Fortunately, the dead husband had appeared almost immediately at Mrs. Laveray's. It was quite wonderful, the quick way he had come through. The first thing he said was that he smelled gas. Queer, wasn't it?

Then there was a young chemist from Kennington—Mr. Guttery. He was a suspicious young fellow and generally asked impertinent questions, with a stammer, so that he was difficult to understand. He was very anxious to see a bit of ectoplasm and a materialisation, but so far as Mrs. Laveray was concerned she didn't hold with things like that. Her friend Mr. Mounsey—a very clever medium up Clerkenwell way and most obliging—had once shown her ectoplasm which made faces and spirit hands but she thought it rather disgusting. Still, that was his line and everybody was at liberty to take the spirits as they found them.

Emery had invited some of his own friends. One of them was the assistant at the public library—Mr. Richardson—who was quite intelligent and interested in all occult matters, after a visit to Boston for the International Congress of Librarians, when he had come into touch with some spiritualists who had told him some very wonderful things about a dead sister. Then there was Ted Hernery, assistant master at the Walworth Street schools, who was a communist and an atheist and

utterly sceptical of Black Magic as he called it. He had once attended a circle which went in for devil worship, but all that had happened had been very dull until one of the women went into convulsions and said she was possessed by seven devils. "And why not?" asked Mr. Hernery in his sarcastic way.

Old Savage, the second-hand bookseller, had promised to come in on the strength of pleasing a good customer. As for spiritualism, he kept an open mind. Shakespeare believed in witches, and what was good enough for Shakespeare seemed to him pretty good. Besides, he said, life was full of mystery and many books came through his hands which made him humble and conscious of his own ignorance, not having time to read them. If the spirits could put him in touch with his dear wife who had gone to her rest after losing her son in the war—"She died of a broken heart, Emery," said Mr. Savage—and with that poor boy who had been struck down in the flower of his youth, he would be very grateful to Mr. Jago.

Emery was humble. Quite sincerely he was determined not to claim an intimate acquaintance with the spirit world.

"I can't promise anything like that," he said. "I'm only just beginning, you know. I can't even vouch for the truth of these things. All I can say is that I'm aware of certain supernormal faculties which can hardly be explained in terms of ordinary intelligence. Once or twice I've had some remarkable experiences. Psychic beyond a doubt. As for clairvoyance, I'm convinced of it. Anyhow, I'm experimenting with great mysteries, Mr. Savage.

So what with Mrs. Laveray's introductions and his own words to private friends, he was pretty sure of getting a dozen people on the night of his first séance. He was making a charge of half a guinea, for a start.

An hour before nine o'clock, which was the time for the séance, he had "the needle" badly, as he told Belle. He drank some brandy—a pretty stiff dose—to pull himself together. A dozen times he went upstairs to see that everything was in working order. The gramophone responded beautifully to the spring which he could touch from his chair in front of the black

curtains. The tambourine tinkled from the ceiling when he gave the slightest tug to the bit of black cotton which he could pull behind his back. "These gadgets are necessary," he said to himself. "It's just suggestion. One can't do without this sort of thing."

The room looked almost vast when he turned the lights out—all except a little red lamp on a pedestal. Its rays hardly penetrated the darkness.

"Darkness made visible," he murmured, remembering some old saying. The Bible, perhaps, though he had never read it. He felt highly strung, emotional. He could feel little rushes of vibration in his arms and at his finger-tips. Undoubtedly he was very psychic. And nervous, too. He started violently when Belle came into the darkened room while he was standing with his back to her and dropped the crystal and said "Drat it!" sharply.

"Good heavens, Belle!" he cried. "I wish you'd make more noise when you walk. You get on my nerves when you creep about like that."

"Nerves!" she said rather sharply. "Well, I like that! What about mine, with all this spiritualism? It's enough to drive me daft. If it wasn't because I love you so much——"

She came up to him and put her hands about his shoulders.

"Em, don't you think you'd better chuck it before it's too late? I'm fed up with it all. I really am. It's not honest."

"Oh, God!" he said angrily. "Haven't we argued all that till we're sick of it. It *is* honest, I tell you. We've got to fake a bit, of course. But in a perfectly legitimate way. Just to keep the audience interested. There's no knowing what's going to happen to-night. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the spirits begin to work. Look at that table the other night when we were getting messages. It fairly rocked."

"I pushed it," said Belle. "I was fed up with the beastly thing. I thought, 'If he wants the rotten thing to rock it jolly well shall rock.'"

Emery was very angry with her.

"That's a lie, and you know it! You were scared

when it began to spell out messages about Black Eagle. That control of mine."

She laughed scornfully.

"You're going daft, Em. You really are."

Then seeing his anger, though only his eyes gleamed in the darkness, she drew his head down and kissed him.

"I'll do any old thing to please you. You know that, don't you? If it's ghosts, it's ghosts and I don't give a damn so long as you like them. Spirit voices, crystal-gazing, any bit of humbug if you'll not look at me so angry, Em."

He was touched by her loyalty, her obedience. He thought, "She's just my little slave. I can do anything with her, if I play the bully now and then."

"Well, I hope you'll be a good girl to-night," he said. "Remember what I told you about the people who are coming. We're going to start with my part of the show. Then afterwards you'll do the crystal-gazing for those who pay the extra fee. Don't go laughing or anything just when you begin to see things."

"I'll get the giggles as sure as fate," said Belle.

It was a foolish weakness of hers and she laughed.

"Oh, Em," she cried, "ain't you funny? I mean, aren't you comical, Mr. Jago? . . . Well, I'm going to have a cup of tea. This dark room gives me the creeps."

He heard her going down to the kitchen, and then lit a cigarette in the darkened room so that the flare of the match shone on his pale face. He saw a reflection of it in a mirror over the mantelpiece, and for a moment was alarmed by his own image.

"My nerves are all on edge," he said aloud.

He went into his bedroom and drank some more brandy to steady those nerves of his.

XIII

He wore a black velvet jacket and Belle had cut the frayed edges off his best pair of trousers, which he had pressed under his mattress. He felt that he looked distinguished, but he was not master of himself when the first people began to arrive. It was his nervousness again. Perhaps he had been foolish to drink so much brandy. It made him feel stupefied. Belle showed the visitors upstairs and arranged them in their chairs round the room. He could see them through the velvet curtains as he stood on the other side, with darkness on his side and light on theirs. Old Savage, the bookseller, was the first to come. He said, "Thank you, missy," to Belle, and then sat looking round the room through his pince-nez and fingering his little grey beard. Then Ted Hernery came wearing a red tie as a sign of his belief in revolution.

"A nice evening for the spooks!" he said brightly to Belle when she pointed to his chair.

"I hope they won't scare you," she answered haughtily.

Belle was certainly a cool little customer, thought Emery, standing there twisting his hands behind his back and trying to get the better of his nerves.

Mr. Guttery, the chemist, was the next arrival—a sandy-haired young man with a white tie and black clothes and brown shoes.

He stammered rather badly.

"I'm afraid I'm rather s-s-s——"

He struggled desperately for the word and twisted himself into a knot.

"Sad?" asked Belle helpfully.

"No," he said. "S-s-s-sceptical."

"Oh, you won't be!" said Belle. "Not when Mr. Jago's done with you."

She gave a suppressed giggle which she disguised hurriedly by a sharp cough.

Emery, standing behind the curtain, swayed a little on heels and toes. That brandy—the filthy stuff—made him feel very queer. He hoped to goodness Belle would behave all right. If she went off into the giggles she'd spoil everything.

But she had pulled herself together again when Lady Ardington arrived with a young man wearing evening clothes and a monocle and a sad-looking lady who was obviously his mother. Mrs. Laveray had described Lady Ardington. There was no mistaking her. She was a tall, handsome woman of about fifty, with an aristocratic nose and thin lips. She carried a lorgnette with which she gazed round the room, while she talked in a high cheerful voice.

"Well, here we are, Charles." That was to the young man with the monocle. "You've come to scoff, I'm sure—oh, the younger generation!—but I hope you'll remain to pray. Dear Mrs. Laveray says this young medium is perfectly wonderful."

"I wish he wouldn't live in such a low neighbourhood," said the young man gazing round the room with disapproval. "I get nervous among the proletariat, with all this communism about."

He adjusted his monocle and stared in a hostile way at Mr. Hernery's red tie.

"Hush, my dear!" said the sad lady who had come with Lady Ardington.

The hospital nurse slipped in with her friend, the young widow, whose spirit husband always smelled gas. Then Mr. Richardson and two others. The last to come was Mrs. Laveray herself—"on a busman's holiday," as she explained. There were affectionate greetings between her and Lady Ardington.

"You darling creature!" cried Lady Ardington. "How are all the dear spirits and that naughty asthma of yours?"

"The spirits are very playful with me," said Mrs. Laveray, "but the asthma is shocking. Can't get the better of it, nohow."

She almost played a tune on her bronchial pipes.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" she wheezed.

"Have you ever tried Dr. Blossom's cigarettes?" asked Lady Ardington. "I'm told they're *miraculous!*"

"'Ush," said Mrs. Laveray solemnly. "'Ere comes Mr. Jago. Psychic to the finger-tips. Invisible spirits walk with him day and night, they tell me."

Emery stepped through the black curtains. He felt dry inside his mouth and there was a cold sweat in the palm of his hands. His head was aching violently because of that brandy. He was just a little drunk, he thought. Almost certainly a little drunk. He avoided the sarcastic eyes of Ted Hernery and fixed his gaze upon Lady Ardington. She looked at him through her lorgnette, beamingly, and then turned and whispered something to the young man with the monocle. Emery heard the whisper as though she had shouted it because of his acute sense of hearing.

"What wonderful eyes! . . . The windows of the soul!"

"'Ush!" said Mrs. Laveray sternly.

Lady Ardington's remark restored his self-confidence somewhat. He bowed to the company and took his seat at the table near the pedestal lamp. Belle, in a plain black frock showing her thin bare arms, was standing ready to turn the lights down as he instructed her. She looked white and strained. Then he began to speak, but it was not the speech which he had prepared. He really felt that he was inspired by some spiritual influence dictating these words. Afterwards he tried to remember them but only knew that he had spoken modestly of his psychic powers and had told these people that he was merely groping toward the light, a wanderer in the unexplored regions of human thought advancing with hesitating steps, feeling in the dark for contact with things unknown, until sometimes his searching hand touched some thread which was like a guiding clue to other worlds. . . . He spoke about the subnormal faculties of the human mind and hidden senses registering the vibrations unperceived by the normal sense of ordinary individuals, and a stream of psychic intelligence and knowledge flowing like ether throughout the universe

and tapped surely, now and then, by individual minds, hypersensitive, and not barricaded behind the walls of a narrow materialism.

"Some of us," he said solemnly, "have this gift of cryptesthesia. We are like telephone receivers, not by any virtue in us, not by any extraordinary knowledge" —he had some trouble with that word "extraordinary" —"but by acute sensibilities."

It was possible, probable even, that the spirit world desired to get into touch with earth-bound souls—their dear ones, their friends, their own living past. What more natural than that they should establish contact with sensitive souls. What more reasonable than that people like themselves, gathered there to-night, should endeavour to help them to establish that contact? . . . It was marvellous how the words flowed from him. He was startled by his own eloquence. "I'm inspired," he thought. "I'm being helped."

He proposed very simply and humbly to go into the silence before them so that any wandering spirits might speak through him if they felt inclined to use him as their medium of communication with people there present. He couldn't vouch for results. Perhaps it depended more upon them than upon him. He would ask his little sister to turn down the lights, and he must ask those present to hold hands and refrain from any interruption until he was possessed by some spirit voice.

He glanced over at Belle. She was staring at him fixedly with a mysterious, lurking smile which made him feel uncomfortable. Was she mocking him? Perhaps she thought he was drunk, just because he had taken a nip or two of brandy to steady his nerves. She was like that—always making fun of him. There was a kind of contempt in that smile of hers. He resented it. He didn't like it. He frowned at her until suddenly she turned out the lights—all except that little red lamp on the pedestal which scarcely penetrated the darkness.

It was time for that gramophone music, to help the atmosphere. He pulled the wire under the table which touched off the spring. It acted all right, except that one heard the preliminary whirr of the record before the needle reached the tune. He could hear his audience

stir in their seats as though startled by this sound. One of them whispered, "What's that?" in a frightened way. He could see their forms like shadows, very vaguely, and patches of whiteness where their faces were faintly reached by the rays of the little lamp.

Then he was startled himself and went hot with annoyance. He had chosen a record of soft and gentle music—the "Schlummerlied" by Schubert. He had tried over dozens before deciding on this one as dreamy and spiritual. He had put it on one side most carefully. But that gramophone was playing something quite different. It was some infernal jazz tune as played by the Savoy Havana Band, "I've got the Wanna-go-home-again Blues." "Curse!" thought Emery fiercely. Other words came into his brain, and they were not nice words. Perhaps in his silly nervous state before the séance he had fumbled about with the records and put on the wrong one after all his trouble. Or perhaps Belle had played a trick on him. If he found that out he would give her a hiding. Make her smart for it, until she howled. What on earth should he do about it? By no jerking of the wire could he stop that frightful tune until it had run down. He could hear the audience whispering. A man's voice—it was probably that young man with the monocle—laughed quietly until hushed by a woman. There was a suppressed giggle. That must be Belle. Just like her, the little fool. Then Mrs. Laveray's voice boomed out.

"They like a bit of jazz, poor dears. All them young officer boys! They have their fox-trots, the darlings. Same as when they came back from the Front on seven days' leave."

"*Most* natural!" said Lady Ardington. "A charming thought."

"Damn' funny," said the Oxford voice of the young man with the monocle.

Relentlessly the awful tune went on with wild and terrible cacophonies.

"Hell and damnation!" thought Emery Jago sitting there at his table getting hot and cold. "Hell and damnation!"

Those words hammered inside his brain until at last

the record ran its course, slowed down, and ended in a fearful discord.

It had jungled his brains frightfully. Only by a terrific act of self-control could he concentrate on going into the silence, making his mind a blank, reaching a state of self-hypnotism. All the time his conscious brain was like a rat running round in a cage. "What am I going to say?" he thought. "What can I tell these people? How can I show them my powers? . . . I wish I hadn't drunk that filthy brandy."

Then a terrible sense of disbelief in all this spiritualism took hold of him.

"It's all a sham," he said inside his mind. "There aren't any spirits. It's a fake from beginning to end. I'm a liar, as Belle says. It's dirty cheating, that's what it is. All the same I've got to go through with it now. Whatever happens, I can't make a fool of myself in front of all these people. I must give them something for their money. Oh, God, what on earth am I going to do about it? What an infernal fool I was to start this muck! That old woman, Mrs. Laveray—I'd like to scrag the old hag. She led me into it with that crystal-gazing. All that stuff about the lady with the bronze-tinted hair. Fake, every bit of it. Hell and damnation!"

It was ten minutes before he could get going. The people were becoming restless. He could hear their breathing, their little movements, their occasional whisperings.

He felt very sleepy. It was the effect of that brandy. He wanted to go to sleep. He had a jolly good mind to go to sleep, just for a second or two. Those people wouldn't guess—in the darkness.

Then quite suddenly he began to speak in the voice of Black Eagle.

It was just as though the Red Indian chief had jumped into his brain and taken possession.

"This is Black Eagle speaking. Don't you remember? I was one of those war birds. Served with the Canadian bunch—Bishop and that crowd. What games we had before going out to the Front! Poor little Billie Carlton—she was a peach with all the boys. There's a fellow

here to-night who wants to get through. He's pushing me away. Says he wants to speak to his wife. He took a whiff of gas when he was fed up because his grateful country didn't care a curse about ex-officer laddies after they'd done their job. Well, all right, old lad. Black Eagle has a sporting spirit. He doesn't grab the telephone when a friend wants to talk to a lady."

"Good heavens!" thought Emery. 'Am I faking, or is this the real thing?"

He couldn't be certain. Perhaps all this stuff was coming out of his subconsciousness. Or perhaps he was sensitive to some thought wave reaching him from one of those minds in the room. Or perhaps he was more drunk than he imagined. What was all that about Billie Carlton? He couldn't remember anything about such a person, though the name seemed vaguely familiar to him. Perhaps he was really possessed by a spirit. Such things did happen. It was extraordinary how the idea of that Red Indian chief kept haunting him.

He could hear some disturbance in the audience. One of the women was sobbing. Others were leaning towards her. It was the woman who had come with the hospital nurse—the one whose husband had pasted up his windows and turned on the gas. Mrs. Laveray had told him that. And yet before he started speaking he hadn't thought about it much. It wasn't deliberate on his part, this reference to that ex-officer. Nothing was deliberate with him. The words just came to his lips.

More words came to his lips, in a different voice. That ex-officer was speaking now, asking questions about his two children. He was anxious that they should get a good schooling. He wanted them brought up to hate war. He said a lot of things about the beauty of peace, and the League of Nations, and the spirit of Locarno. He also made some reference to a hospital nurse who had been very kind to his wife. She had a brother on his side of No Man's Land. A fellow called Bert, who had been pipped on the Somme and gone missing. That was what the War Office had said. "Gone missing." As a matter of fact he had been lying out in a shell hole until he was buried under another name.

Emery wondered whether any of this stuff was true.

Or was he just faking it all? He couldn't be sure. Of course he had picked up some of it at Mrs. Laveray's. But then the words seemed to flow on without any act of will-power on his part. He had a curious sense of being outside his own body and possessed by some other personality. He was certainly in a highly wrought state, and felt rather ill. Almost faint. Rather sick, too. But he went on talking and was aware that his silent company was intensely interested, listening with strained attention.

"Anyhow, I'm making a hit," he thought. "Fake or no fake. And I don't care a damn for any of them."

And then he was frightened. As he sat staring into the darkness, just able to perceive the forms of people and the vagueness of their faces, he became aware of a strong scent of roses. "That's queer!" he thought, not frightened yet, but acutely sensitive to that new and fragrant smell. He was saying something about a spirit who had come up out of the sea—was that some unconscious reference to Lady Ardington's lover?—when the words were frozen on his lips. There was something moving at the far end of the room, by the window. It looked at first like a patch of light on the floor—a whiteness, squirming. It seemed to rise and materialise into a white form, filmy and diaphanous. It was a human form, with a face and hands. It moved into the centre of the room. It was—he could almost swear—a little girl with a daisy chain round her hair and some flowers in her hands. It was the Elsie of his vision, Belle's dead sister who had appeared to him several times as he had sat alone in darkness trying to get in touch with the other side. She seemed to be floating round the room very slowly with a rhythmic movement of the hands. She was scattering flowers into the laps of the people there. They too were aware of her, as Emery could tell by their nervous breathing, their little frightened movements. Mrs. Laveray or someone gave a kind of gasp.

Emery felt a strange tightness about the scalp. He could feel his hair rising on his head. All his nerves quivered. There was an acute pain in his solar plexus. He had all the symptoms of fear which he had known

as a small boy when he used to wake up suddenly and scream for his mother because strange monsters were about to devour him.

"It's a spirit!" he thought. "I've materialised it. It's Elsie come to get in touch with Belle. She's wearing that daisy chain—just as I saw her! And I can smell the flowers. They're roses . . . I'll never fake again. I swear to God I won't—if there is a God."

There was a cold sweat on his forehead. He felt paralysed. Not for the life of him could he have turned his head or raised a hand. His neck seemed stiff as though he had been under heavy shell-fire, according to fellows who had been in the war. And yet above this fear which controlled his body that mind of his was active and alert.

"Amazing!" he thought. "A materialized spirit at my very first séance. . . . It's a lesson against scepticism. I've been blaspheming against the spirit world—denying it as all a fake. And now Elsie comes with her little daisy chain!"

There was the sound of a kiss in the room, followed by a frightened cry from one of the women.

"I say, hang it all!" said the young man with the monocle.

One of the women gave a kind of moan or whimper and seemed to fall sideways off her chair on to the oak-stained boards.

"Oh . . . Oh!"

She was moaning on the floor with others bending over her. A flower touched Emery on the back of his right hand. He could feel its coldness and wetness, and all his nerves quivered at the touch of it.

"Look here, turn up the lights, can't you?" cried a loud, petulant voice which belonged to the young man with the monocle. "A lady has fainted. All this infernal humbug!"

It was Mr. Guttery, the chemist, who turned up the lights, after feeling round the walls.

"This is a bit thick," he said huskily, with a tremor in his voice. "It's going a b-b-bit too f-f-f-far in my opinion."

He and Ted Hernery lifted up the lady who had

fainted. It was the widow of the man who had gassed himself.

Emery was still in a state of nervous prostration. He pushed the hair back from his forehead with a trembling hand.

"I hadn't an idea," he said, and found himself stammering like Mr. Guttery. "It was—it was Elsie! She came with r-r-r-roses!"

There were rose petals on the floor. There was a wet white rose at his feet. Another lay in the lap of Mrs. Laveray.

"Well, I must say it's all gone off very nicely," said that lady with an asthmatical cough. "Wonderful!"

"Yes, indeed," said Lady Ardington. "Most impressive! Quite startling. And I hope that poor creature isn't too frightfully frightened. One has to get used to these things. Of course, I've been to so many séances."

"I'm amazed," said Mr. Savage, the bookseller. "It's surprising, I will say that."

"What I want to know," said Ted Hernery, loudly and fiercely, as though challenging someone—"What I'd like to know is where these here roses came from. They don't grow roses in Heaven, do they?"

"Certainly they does," said Mrs. Laveray sternly. "Why ever not, young man? Answer me that!"

"What about soils and manures?" he asked indignantly. "I live on sand, so I know."

The young widow was recovering under the care of the hospital nurse. Lady Ardington was speaking to Emery.

"Such a dear spirit-child!" she exclaimed. "I could hear the patter of her little bare feet. Tell me. Is she one of your controls?"

"I see her in the darkness," said Emery. He was standing now swaying to and fro. "She appears to me. Always with a daisy chain round her hair. It's Elsie. She died some years ago. A relative of mine."

He hesitated to say that she was the sister of Belle Chubb.

"Well," said Lady Ardington in her kind, gracious way, "no wonder she wants to come back and talk to you. Those wonderful eyes of yours——"

She smiled into his eyes through her lorgnette.

"Tell me," she said, "do you find it very exhausting —this wonderful work of yours?"

"It affects the nerves," said Emery, rather sullenly. "One gets nervous, you know."

He wiped the cold sweat from his forehead.

Lady Ardington agreed cordially.

"I know, I know! I'm very psychic myself and *so* nervous! But it's all fascinating. One lives so closely to the other side. Just a thin partition—a little veil. I must bring some of my sceptical friends. That dear soul Miss Jaffrey, the actress, you know, and that brilliant man Mr. Adrian Mallard, K.C. We were talking the other night——"

"Don't you think we'd better go, Aunt?" said the young man with the monocle. He muttered something else under his breath. "This sort of thing bores me stiff."

Lady Ardington tapped him on the hand with her lorgnette. "Now, Charles!"

Belle stood between the velvet curtains and made her little announcement about the crystal-gazing—just as Emery had rehearsed her—but after the spirit manifestation the company seemed shaken.

"I'll get back to the shop," said Mr. Savage, the bookseller. "I'm sure it makes one think—all this. Very startling."

"Nobody'll make me believe that roses grow in Heaven," said Ted Hemery, glaring round at everybody. "It stands to reason. . . ."

One by one they departed, and Belle showed them out of the front door. Then she came upstairs to the big room where Emery still stood, pale and emotional after this experience. The fumes of that wretched brandy still made him feel a little sick.

Then it was true, all this. He had faked a bit just to create atmosphere but a spirit had come through. Little Elsie! . . . Elsie! His little Elsie!

"Belle!" he said solemnly. "What did I tell you? I'm a bit of a faker but a spirit came through all right. Little Elsie!"

Belle Chubb flopped into a chair and began laughing hysterically.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh, I think I'll die. Oh, my goodness! I'll laugh myself to death! Em, you idiot! . . . You comical Mr. Jago!"

He seized her roughly by the shoulder and shook her.

"What do you mean?" he asked fiercely. "Why are you laughing like that? What the devil are you getting at?"

She sat up with that laughter in her eyes.

"Why, you silly old Em!" she cried. "It was me all the giddy time. I told you I had a sense of humour, didn't I? Them roses! Why, I bought 'em in Electric Avenue. I'll teach 'em I said. If it's ghosts, it's ghosts. . . . I put on my dancing frock and left off my shoes and stockings and made a daisy chain for my hair. . . . And I've kidded you up to the neck, Em!"

"Blast you!" he said, "blast you!" and struck her across the face with the back of his hand.

BOOK TWO

ADRIAN MALLARD

I

It will be remembered, perhaps, that Adrian Mallard, K.C., attended a séance at Emery Jago's over the photographer's shop in Ezra Road, Brixton, with that charming actress, Rose Jaffrey, Professor Boyd of King's College, and Wilfred Neal, whom the lady called "Billy."

It was nearly midnight when they left Brixton in Mallard's Rolls-Royce, and it would be reasonable to suppose that after taking the lady home to her flat in Sloane Street (Mallard raised her hand to his lips before saying "Good-night, my dear") the three men would have separated and gone to their respective homes for a fair night's sleep. But one of them was Adrian Mallard, and he hated going to bed because it seemed to him such a waste of waking life and he needed less sleep than most hard workers in the world.

"Better come in and have a drink," he suggested to Boyd as his car, that shining symbol of success, slowed down at the corner of Hans Crescent and pulled up outside a block of Service flats. "You too, Billy."

Professor Boyd laughed in his high-pitched voice.

"We haven't all got your vital energy, old man. Inexhaustible! I'm lecturing to-morrow at ten o'clock. 'Ideas and Concepts!' . . . Still, a drink is a drink."

"I think I'll get back," said Wilfred Neal, the youngest of the three. "My chief at the Foreign Office——"

He yielded good-naturedly when Mallard linked arms with him and said, "Don't tell me you know what work is—at the F. O.! Not so strenuous as my job to-morrow, anyhow. I'm defending that swine who murdered his landlady after pinching all her savings."

"What a man!" exclaimed Boyd, referring not to the murderer, but to Mallard. "No nerves. Health

abounding. Dynamic energy at work or play. No wonder he earns thirty thousand a year by arguing that black is white and playing on the emotions of fat-headed juries."

Mallard laughed quietly.

"Yes, health abounding—and terrific egotism. Those two qualities have pushed me up the ladder. Health above all."

He ignored the night-porter who moved toward the lift and ran lightly and rapidly up two flights of stairs. He had already opened the door of his flat with a Yale key before Boyd joined him, puffing a little.

"These athletes!" groaned Boyd, taking off his black hat and thrusting his long fingers through that red hair which had given him the name of Rufus among his students at King's College.

Mallard did not answer immediately. He too seemed slightly out of breath after that long run upstairs, and Boyd, who heard his jerky breathing, was rather pleased.

"Hullo," he thought, "even our athlete begins to feel the touch of middle age."

Mallard switched on all the lights he could find in the hall and in the room beyond.

"My man has gone to bed," he remarked presently. "Sensible fellow! And my wife no doubt is at one of those tedious night clubs which will certainly spoil her complexion, as I venture to tell her when we meet—occasionally but not often—in our happy married life. . . . Well, whisky's the best drink, don't you think?"

They agreed, and he unlocked the tantalus and took the glasses off the sideboard where they had been placed by some thoughtful servant.

Boyd noticed the bitterness of his voice when he spoke of that pretty wife of his. Things had been going wrong in that direction for some time. It was only at public dinners now and then that one saw Mallard with his wife. Otherwise they seemed to live very much apart, going their own ways. Whose fault? he wondered. Mallard's, possibly, though there was something just a little hard and cattish about the beautiful Evelyn. But Mallard was absorbed in his own personality—an incurable egoist, in his work, in his ambition, in his rapid

and continuous success, even in his games which he played with as much vigour and enthusiasm as he gave to his briefs and his part in court : to the gallery as well as to the jury.

Not easy to be the wife of a man who sometimes sat up all night when he had played rackets all day, or rose at four in the morning to tackle a brief which he had ignored until it was in the cause list for that day. Not easy to play up to a man who dominated any society in which he happened to be because of his unceasing vivacity, and was always restless for some new excitement or interest if he had a few hours' leisure when he might be resting. Not easy—and yet a woman must be a fool if she failed to play up to such a brilliant, boyish, gay, and impetuous fellow who had reached the top rung of the ladder five years younger than most of his contemporaries at the Bar and had almost anything within his reach.

" Cigarettes ? " said Mallard, pushing over a silver box.

He flung himself down in the most comfortable chair in the room—that was characteristic of him—and stretched out his long legs and puffed a ring of cigarette smoke towards the ceiling. Boyd watched him and thought he looked melancholy and perhaps even a little unwell. Mallard unwell ? No, that was a ridiculous thought. It was more likely that he had been startled by that séance—the " spirit voice " of his brother Ivo who had been killed in the war.

For a few moments his eyes roved about the room as though interested in the pictures and trophies. This was his working room and it was filled with the record of his personality. There was a portrait by Orpen of him in flannels open at the neck. That was when he had won the rackets championship. There were framed photographs of the Magdalen crew in which he had been Number 3 at Henley. There was a half-length of himself in wig and gown by Lavery, and some caricatures of himself in court—they exaggerated the length of his nose and the rake of his jaw—by Reynolds of *Punch*. On the sideboard, each side of the tantalus, were some silver pots which he had taken for ski-ing in Mürren. He had succeeded in everything he touched just because

of his vitality and enthusiasm. It had all seemed to come easily to him, but only because he had done everything as well as he knew how. He had always played the game—all out—whatever it was.

It was only for a minute or so that he sat back in his chair. That restlessness of his sent him striding up and down the room while Boyd was drinking his whisky and watching him with an amused smile—as though he were some biological specimen—through his horn-rimmed glasses, and Wilfred Neal, that charming boy, sat swinging his legs on the corner of the table and glancing at the evening paper to see the latest cricket scores.

"Queer experience—that séance," said Mallard. "Do you think that girl was faking, Boyd? About Ivo, I mean."

"Difficult to tell," answered Boyd in his non-committal way. "Half these people are frauds."

"Poor old Ivo!" said Mallard with a sudden, quick sigh. "To hear his voice again from the other side—I'd like to believe it!"

"I wouldn't go as far as to say that the whole thing is a delusion or a fake," said Boyd. "As a psychologist, rather interested in the supernormal senses, I keep an open mind."

"Is that good enough?" asked Mallard, rather impatiently. "An open mind doesn't get one anywhere. I'm beginning to want—certainty."

Boyd was amused by this desire, which seemed to him hopelessly unscientific.

"Certainty? One can't be certain of anything since the discovery of radium and relativity."

He was amused by his own epigram and then chaffed Mallard in his argumentative way.

"Regarding you as one of our smiling cynics, a professional pleader of legal sophistries, I'm surprised at you. What do you want to be certain about?"

Mallard answered without flippancy.

"Life—and death—and what happens afterwards—if anything. What's the good of you scientific laddies if you can't tell us that?"

Wilfred Neal, the youngest of them, who had been sitting on the table swinging his legs and glancing at the

Evening News, looked over at Mallard and raised his eyebrows with a suggestion of surprise. Rather a queer remark that!

Mallard was his legal guardian but more like his elder brother. There was twenty years' difference between them, but Mallard made him forget that sometimes because of his zest for any game that was going. At school—Stonyhurst—a certain reflected glory had come to him because of Mallard's fame even then. "My guardian." Mentioned quietly to the other fellows when Adrian Mallard was defending some notorious criminal, still more when he won the international rackets championship, the effect was impressive among the senior boys who read the *Daily Mail*. Once or twice, Mallard had come down to see him, immaculately dressed, looking tremendously distinguished, but without the slightest side, although the rector and all the masters received him with unusual honours—dinner in the Stuart Room and all that. They had only once spoken about religion. That was when Wilfred had left school and gone up to Oxford.

"Look here, young fellow," Mallard had said, "I'm an agnostic. Utterly without religious convictions, alas. But if I were you I would hold on to that faith of yours. It keeps a fellow straight and it gives a meaning to life which is very helpful, I should say."

He had laughed, put his hand on Wilfred's shoulder, and said, "I've a great respect for Catholics, and without some kind of religion this world is going to hell, that's certain."

That was the only time Mallard had ever alluded to religious subjects, though he had talked and talked about everything else under the sun. Since Wilfred had come down from Oxford and got a job in the Foreign Office, entirely through Mallard's influence and good nature, he had been seeing a good deal of his guardian. Mallard came round to his rooms pretty often, took him off to the theatre when he had a free evening, played golf with him when he could get a week-end, introduced him to charming people like Rose Jaffrey. Yes, he owed everything to this delightful egoist. But it was strange to hear him talking about death and what happened afterward.

He had been harping on that at supper, before going to that long-haired medium in Brixton. It was a new idea of his. That spiritualistic stuff—absolute bunk—seemed to have got hold of his imagination.

Professor Boyd—that red-headed Peter—was talking rather ponderously from the depths of his chair.

"Science hasn't got as far as 'afterward.' We're not prepared—yet—to admit the survival of personality. Although personally I believe we're groping toward a more spiritual conception of life. The old mechanistic ideas—neo-Darwinism and all that Victorian materialism—are hopelessly out of date. We are seeing something like intelligence and design."

"God, do you mean?" asked Mallard bluntly.

Boyd shrugged his shoulders.

"Creative evolution. Mind working in matter. Call it 'God' if you like."

"I don't call it anything," said Mallard. "I want to know. I'm darkly ignorant about those things. You see I've never had time for them."

Wilfred Neal interrupted this dialogue presently.

"Well, I'll be going. Thanks for an amusing evening, sir."

Mallard smiled at him and put a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"You're certain of all these things," he said. He drew the boy toward him with an arm round his shoulder and a strange, unaccustomed tenderness. "Lucky for you, young fellow. We middle-aged infidels and sceptics——"

Young Neal laughed in a shy way, surprised by this demonstration of affection, and slightly embarrassed.

"I leave things to authority," he answered lightly. "Holy Mother Church! It saves a lot of trouble. . . . Well, good-night."

The two elder men watched him leave the room and heard the click of the outside door behind him.

"Nice boy," said Boyd, squirting some more soda into his whisky.

Mallard agreed, with his usual touch of exaggeration.

"The most charming lad in the world. We're the greatest pals."

Boyd glanced at him a moment, furtively, with the flicker of a smile.

"He seemed enormously taken to-night with the charming Miss Jaffrey."

Mallard laughed good-naturedly, without a touch of annoyance.

"Oh, Billy has charming manners. Rose likes him tremendously."

Professor Boyd was silent for a few moments. He seemed to be interested in the pattern of the carpet, until he looked up suddenly and spoke in a hesitating way.

"I say, old man—excuse my saying so, won't you?—but I was rather struck by one thing that girl medium said to-night when she pretended to be your brother Ivo—if it was pretending."

"Shamming flagrantly, I'm afraid," said Mallard. "What thing?"

Boyd hesitated before he answered.

"'Watch your step with the pretty ladies!' A kind of warning, eh? It occurred to me——"

"Yes?" said Mallard sharply.

"That it might refer to a certain young lady named Rose Jaffrey."

"Meaning what?" asked Mallard, very coldly, though a faint colour flushed his face.

"Meaning that as a married man with a great career ahead of you it's rather dangerous, perhaps, to see so much of a very alluring and attractive young lady."

Mallard waved his hand impatiently.

"Rubbish! I like seeing her. She's exquisite and has a lovely mind."

"I agree," said Boyd. "But it is the second time this week that she has had supper with you at the Carlton. And three times last week, wasn't it?"

"Who told you that?" asked Mallard, rather sharply. His temper was rising, his irritability, which was a sign of middle-age and nerve strain.

Boyd did not give the source of his information. "I hear things," he said.

Mallard shrugged his shoulders. "Even an actress must have supper somewhere, mustn't she, poor girl!

after the theatre? Do you think my reputation is likely to hurt her? I fancy I've led a clean life."

"One of our idealists!" said Boyd. "That's why we, your friends and hero-worshippers, can't have you let down by—indiscretion. People are beginning to talk, old man."

"What people?" asked Mallard savagely. "What damned impertinent swine?"

A sudden gust of anger seemed to storm in his brain. He sprang up from his chair and began to pace the room very rapidly, trying to resist this absurd irritability which made him alarmed sometimes.

"Well," said Boyd cautiously, "I read a paragraph the other night in one of the papers. It suggested in the usual bland and innocent way—no harm meant!—that one of our leading K.C.'s was cornering a table at the Carlton where he could be seen very frequently with one of our most beautiful and talented actresses."

Mallard laughed loudly and harshly but raised his clenched fists.

"Those infernal gossip-mongers! If they're not careful of the law of libel——"

"Your wife showed it to me," said Boyd. "It seemed to amuse her a good deal, but that kind of amusement is rather—well—distressing."

Mallard came to a dead halt.

"Evelyn showed it to you, did she? You and she tittered over it, I suppose. 'Poor old Adrian has fallen for a little actress!' Oh, I can hear you both sniggering over the inevitable weakness of human nature—and Evelyn's sarcastic laughter. . . . Damn you! . . . Damn you!"

He was incredibly angry. Boyd who had been his friend since school days, had never seen him in this white-heat of passion. It seemed to shake him.

"Not fair, old man!" said Boyd. "Go easy. I'm only giving you a friendly tip. I'm jealous of your reputation."

Mallard strode about the room again, until he faced round and spoke passionately with a fierce light in his eyes.

"My friendship with Rose Jaffrey isn't going to hurt

my reputation. She has the mind of a clear spring. I have a worshipful love for her—worshipful!—and I've been starved of love for years. Evelyn doesn't care a curse for me. Night after night she goes out to those dance clubs with Freddy Duke and a crowd of immoral, loose-living young swine, and I've no more home life than a Jesuit priest. And I've lived like a priest, for years. I've never played about with women. I've played the game by Evelyn. But do you think she plays the game by me? Why, I've enough evidence to get her divorced to-morrow, if I liked to use it. I don't like to use it. I've seen enough dirty linen washed in open court. I don't even blame her. I admit quite frankly that I've put my career first and that I'm an egoist up to the eyebrows, absorbed in my own work and my own ambitions. But I'm not going to have Evelyn or anyone else slandering Rose Jaffrey because she is good enough to like me and because her exquisite spirit keeps me straight when I might be tempted to play the fool. . . . I'm very angry! Very angry!"

"My dear old man," said Boyd, "people are beginning to talk. I've heard it in the clubs. As a man of the world—with more experience than most people about the causes of divorce and life's temptations—you ought to realise."

Mallard's face was no longer flushed. It had become deadly pale, but there was a smile on his lips and a kind of scornful amusement in his eyes. He breathed rather heavily and seemed to be trying to get a grip on his temper.

"Boyd," he said, "you silly old devil! If you weren't my best friend I'd smash that ugly old mug of yours and kick you out of this flat. As it is, you've made me angry—so ridiculously angry that I'm rather afraid—I'm damnably afraid——"

His hand pressed tightly against his ribs on his left side. Then, quite suddenly, he gave a lurch sideways against the table, as though he had stumbled over something, and fell in a crumpled way face down on the carpet with one arm twisted beneath his body.

II

It was the shock of Boyd's life, though he had others.

When he saw Mallard twisted up like that on the floor, he sat staring at him in a paralysed way as though he too had been stricken. What on earth had happened? Mallard, of all men in the world—this athlete, this man of dynamic energy and inexhaustible vitality, lying there like a log on the carpet! "Health abounding!" Hadn't he said something about that? They'd had supper at the Carlton with that lady, Rose Jaffrey, exquisitely beautiful off the stage as well as on. Mallard had talked a lot, laughed a lot. He had been interested in a discussion about spiritualism. Boyd had laid down the law as usual. Mallard had talked about the survival of personality—harped on it a good deal. He had said that death cut things off too abruptly. He wanted to keep up his interests in life. He would like to know how his friends were getting on, how civilization would shape out. He couldn't bear the idea of just snuffing out into nothingness. It made life seem so futile. And yet he had no faith in a future life. No certain faith. He envied young Neal—Billy—with his Catholic certainties. All that had been between himself and Mallard, while young Neal had talked with Miss Jaffrey, shyly, but as though her beauty had startled him.

So the supper had gone on until Boyd had suggested going to a séance in that medium's place at Brixton—Emery Jago was the fellow's name—recommended by Lady Ardington as the most wonderful medium in London. Mallard had seemed amused and had persuaded Rose Jaffrey to go with them.

Nothing much had happened. Just that stuff about Ivo—Mallard's young brother who had been killed in the

war. Extraordinary, of course, but not convincing. Mallard hadn't seemed upset at all, though he had looked pale when the lights went up. It couldn't have been that. Boyd had given him a friendly warning about that Jaffrey girl. It had made him angry. But anger doesn't send a man down with a crash. Why had he lurched suddenly in a drunken way like that? Why was he lying all crumpled up?

All those thoughts rushed through Boyd's brain under that red hair of his which seemed to be standing on end. He went down on his knees beside his friend and cried: "Mallard! Mallard, old man!" Then he pulled him over almost roughly, so that he lay on his back with his head sideways and his cheek touching the carpet. He looked bad.

Boyd stood up and said, "Good God! Good God!" —though a little earlier he had shrugged his shoulders on the subject of God and had preferred the name of Creative Evolution. Then he rushed to the bell and rang it, and went out into the hall and rang other bells and shouted: "Sadler! Sadler!" for Mallard's man.

The man came quickly out of a door at the end of the passage and startled Boyd. He had never seen this silent, respectable, deferential man in pyjamas, with bare feet and tousled hair.

"Is the master taken bad again?" he asked rather breathlessly. "That's the second time."

"Do you mean to say it has happened before?" asked Boyd, very frightened.

The man nodded.

"Yes, sir. After a game of rackets at the Bath Club. 'Too many cigarettes,' he said, and wouldn't let me send for a doctor. It's serious, in my opinion."

He was trembling with excitement which his training as a perfect manservant endeavoured to control.

"Oh, sir!" he whispered, "if anything happened to Mr. Mallard——"

"Ring up a doctor," said Boyd sharply. "For God's sake——"

It was the second time that night that he had called on God, of whom, as a scientist, he was extremely doubtful.

Before the doctor came Mallard was sitting in his chair again, after gulping down some neat whisky. Boyd and Sadler had dragged him up from the floor and loosened his collar.

"Sorry, Rupert," he said presently, with a good attempt at his old jauntiness. "Smoker's heart, you know. Too many cigarettes. Foolish habit!"

"Yes," said Boyd, "I expect you've been overstraining yourself. Burning the candle at both ends. It can't be done in the romantic forties. Not even by an athlete."

He too spoke lightly, with a smile about his lips, though he was desperately alarmed.

"It's nothing," said Mallard. He repeated the word "nothing" as though perhaps trying to convince himself as well as Boyd.

"I've sent for a doctor," Boyd told him. "Better be on the safe side, don't you think? A tonic and so forth."

Mallard hated the idea of a doctor. He hadn't seen a doctor as far as his own bodily health was concerned since he had had mumps at Eton. He had a perfect constitution. Perhaps he had been working rather too hard lately—a whole string of important cases and only an occasional chance of decent exercise. Then he had been smoking too many cigarettes. If he cut down a bit on nicotine poisoning. . . .

"Good evening," said the doctor brightly. "Mr. Adrian Mallard, K.C.? Nothing wrong, I hope?"

He was an elegant young man attached to a hotel near by and accustomed to night calls from rich patients. He had his little black bag with him, prepared for all eventualities from suicide by drugs to a case of delirium tremens. There were strange calls in the night in the neighbourhood of Knightsbridge.

"Good evening, Doctor," said Mallard. "I'm afraid you've been hauled out of bed to no purpose. I came over queer, as they say in the witness box. A touch of indigestion, I imagine. Have a drink, won't you?"

"Thanks!" answered the young doctor brightly. "But first of all I'd better take a squint at you. Heart a little queer, eh?"

"Oh, my heart's all right," said Mallard. "Sound as a bell. Barring cigarettes, perhaps."

"Quite," agreed the doctor. "Quite. Well, let's have a look, Mr. Mallard. Shan't keep you long."

His way of looking was to listen down a kind of telephone which he attached to his ears, after Boyd and Sadler had taken off Mallard's coat and waistcoat and slipped off his shirt. Mallard winked over the doctor's shoulder at Boyd, as much as to say, "These medical Johnnies! Absurd nonsense, making such a fuss!"

Boyd glanced at Mallard's chest and shoulders—the torso of an athlete, beautiful in its strength and whiteness. A sculptor would have felt his fingers tingle to get at his clay with such a model. Mallard had been a rowing man and played every game with an easy skill and boyish passion. Good old Mallard!

That doctor was taking a deuce of a time dabbing that tube against different parts of Mallard's chest and back, listening as though he had the head-phones on for some broadcast opera or Prime Minister's speech. Boyd cursed him inwardly for this interminable curiosity. Mallard became impatient and laughed nervously.

"The tyranny of science!" he remarked to Boyd.

The young doctor took off his telephone and slipped it into his little black bag.

"Yes," he said. "Thanks, Mr. Mallard. Been overdoing it, haven't you?"

"In what way?" asked Mallard.

The young doctor laughed as though at a good jest.

"In every way, I should say! Overwork. Violent exercise. No let-up for the nervous system. Not a chance for an overstrained heart."

"Smoker's heart," said Mallard. "Nothing more than that. Thirty cigarettes a day. Rather foolish, eh?"

The doctor looked at him sharply, as though wondering how much to say. Boyd at least noted that look and felt dejected.

"Not too good, thirty cigarettes," said the doctor. "Still, to be quite frank, it's rather more—organic—than nicotine poisoning. I mean you'll have to be careful. It's so often the case with athletes—and of course I know your record, Mr. Mallard. They *will* try and keep up to form as though they had the gift of

eternal youth, after thirty-five, for instance. Besides, most of them have strained their hearts long before that. I don't believe much in rowing and running for young men, as far as physical fitness goes. The heart can't stand it sometimes. Puts it out of gear, as you might say."

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Mallard sharply. "It's the finest training in the world. I never felt so fit as after Henley when we rowed ourselves all out—years ago."

He spoke angrily, as though he resented this attack on rowing and British sport.

"Yes," said the doctor. "All out, that's it. Some men do themselves permanent damage. Not that I think you did, Mr. Mallard. It's more recent in your case. Let's see, how long ago is it since you won the rackets championship?"

"Last year," Mallard told him. "What's that got to do with it?"

"Well," said the young doctor, "you've got to be careful."

He glanced at Boyd. There was no mistaking his meaning. It was a desire to be left alone with his patient.

Boyd slipped out of the room and closed the door.

He paced up and down another room for twenty minutes. It was the drawing-room in which sometimes he had tea with Mallard's wife, the elegant Evelyn, and her rather senseless friends, her gay crowd. Now and again he went to the door to listen and he could hear two voices speaking. Occasionally Mallard raised his voice, as though angry. Once there was a long silence which to Boyd seemed sinister and disquieting. Then the doctor spoke again in low tones. A little ormolu clock on the mantelpiece struck two.

Boyd felt shaken and nervy. He and Mallard had been close friends at Eton, at Balliol, and afterwards. He was as proud of Mallard's career as if it had been his own brother's. He had watched it with amazement and admiration and envy—as the seventh wonder of the world. Mallard's ceaseless industry, his inexhaustible vivacity, his brilliance, his audacity, his rapid and startling success, his astounding combination of work

and sport. No other man he knew could have put so much into twenty-four hours. If anything happened to Mallard. . . . Unconsciously he repeated the words of that man Sadler whom he could hear pacing the corridor outside the drawing-room in slippered feet.

At last the door of Mallard's study opened and the doctor came out with a cheerful remark.

"Good evening. Thanks for calling me."

Boyd went to him in the hall as he took his umbrella out of the stand.

"Serious?" he asked in a low, tense voice.

The doctor glanced at him suspiciously, not knowing his relationship to Mallard.

"He'll have to be careful," he said cautiously. "Good night. I can let myself out."

Boyd went back into Mallard's study. He was sitting there in his chair and his face was white and drooped a little on his chest, until he heard Boyd's footsteps, when he straightened himself up.

"Well, old man?" asked Boyd.

He could not keep the tremor from his voice—a desperate anxiety.

Mallard looked at him with stricken eyes.

"*Angina pectoris*," he said quietly. "Sentence of death, Boyd."

He rose slowly from his chair and stood there, looking across the room, not at Boyd but at some pale, dread vision.

"Death," he said in a harsh whisper. "Death. . . . That's what it means."

There was a terrible silence in the room until Boyd gave a kind of cry, harsh and incredulous.

"No! . . . No, old man!"

Mallard did not seem to hear that cry of disbelief. He slipped his hand into the breast pocket of his dinner-jacket and pulled out his cigarette case and tried to light a cigarette. But his hand trembled as he held the match, and he tossed the cigarette into the fireplace and stubbed out the match in the ash-tray on the mantelpiece.

"The end of all things," he said presently in a low voice which Boyd had sometimes heard in court when

Mallard was addressing a jury emotionally, gravely, in some murder case when a man's life hung on his words.

"Of course I knew, after that first attack. I called it 'Smoker's heart' and kidded myself. It's not the first time I've heard of *angina pectoris*. A man can carry on for a while. Then one day he gets a jolt—stumbles over a piece of orange peel, gets into a rage about some damn' triviality—and drops dead as if he'd been shot through the heart. Full stop. An end to ambition, egoism, the good game of life, the vital urge, love, little dinners at the Carlton—everything. Snuffed out. Extinguished. *Fini mon vieux!*"

He clenched his hands together and raised them like that above his head and gave a cry of anguish.

"Steady, old man!" said Boyd. "I don't believe it. We'll take better advice than that jaunty young doctor's. What does *he* know? With a little care you'll soon be as fit as a fiddle. With your magnificent constitution——"

He went close to Mallard and put his hand on his shoulder, but Mallard moved away from him, and for a moment went through his agony again.

Then he became calmer and spoke again quietly, with a kind of apology for this revelation of weakness.

"It's because I'm such a damned egoist, Boyd. You see, I've never had a day's illness in my life—before that jolt the other day. I've been so infernally interested in myself that I can't bring myself to believe that it's all going to end. 'Mallard, K.C., the famous athlete, you know!' The court is always crowded when he's got a good case. They point him out at the Carlton. . . . 'That's Mallard. Won the rackets championship last year. Can't think how he gets it all in. Wonder he finds time to sleep. He can do anything in politics if he gets his chance. Our future Attorney General.' . . . All that has been jam to me, Boyd. I've lived on my personality. Frightfully amused by myself! That's why I dislike the idea of sudden death—that snuffing out. It seems—impossible."

Boyd denounced the young doctor again as an ass and ignoramus. Mallard must go and see a specialist—one of the big men.

But Mallard waved that idea on one side.

"It's true," he said. "*Angina pectoris*. Death staring me in the face at close quarters. To-day, to-morrow, six months—suddenly, anyhow. Well, why not? Ivo faced it in the trenches. All those millions of boys faced it without whining. I escaped all that. Now it's my turn. . . . I wouldn't mind so much if I believed in a future life—the survival of personality. Egoism again. That's why I went to that medium to-night. That's why I rather want to believe that doll-faced girl wasn't faking. Death wouldn't have any terrors for me if I knew I was going to meet old Ivo on the other side of the bridge, and other fellows; if I knew I was going to carry on somehow. That's why Billy has the pull on us, Boyd. He's certain of all that. Hasn't a doubt about it. Holy Mother Church tells him so!"

He laughed, and Boyd thanked God (in whom he didn't believe) for that note of laughter.

"Yes," said Boyd, "one would like to carry on. One of these days perhaps science may get as far as—well, a definite proof of survival. We might find out. Who knows?"

"Yes, find out for me, Boyd," said Mallard. "I'm keen to know!"

His old humour had come back to him for a moment—his courage, even the colour to his face.

But he spoke gravely again, grabbing Boyd by the arm.

"Not a word about this to anybody else, you know. Nothing to Rose, or young Billy, or any of my friends. Sacred word of honour?"

"Not a word, old man," said Boyd.

The tall clock in the hall chimed out three, and a few minutes later, when Boyd was leaving, there was the sound of the front door opening and shutting quietly.

"Who's that?" asked Boyd, startled for a moment.

Mallard raised his head and listened.

"My beautiful wife returned from her night club. . . . Quite early!"

He whispered with a sudden alarm.

"Not a word to *her*, Boyd!"

She came in, seeing the lights up, and stood for a moment in the doorway with raised eyebrows and a smile which was not altogether friendly, thought Boyd. She was a slim, graceful blonde in a white silk cloak which fell away from her bare shoulders. She looked girlish and ten years younger that Mallard, but there was something hard about the line of her lips, Boyd reflected, and in her pale blue eyes. She did not notice her husband's pallor.

"Hullo!" she said. "Still talking?"

"Trivialities," said Mallard. "Had a good time?"

"Fairly good," she answered carelessly, and then gave a little laugh which wasn't quite pleasant to hear.

"Freddy Duke gave a supper party at the Carlton before we went on to the Russian cabaret. You were so much engaged with your little crowd that we didn't care to distract your attention. Rose Jaffrey was absorbed in your monologue, Adrian. How nice for you!"

"As long as you were happy—" answered Mallard calmly.

"Oh, perfectly! . . . Well, good-night!"

She nodded to Boyd and went out of the room. They heard the rustle of silk going down the corridor, and then the slam of a bedroom door.

Mrs. Adrian Mallard—the beautiful Evelyn—was unaware that her husband had been sentenced to death that night. He wondered whether it would have disturbed her sleep at all.

III

BEFORE the Long Vacation Adrian Mallard arranged to go down to his country house in Surrey, and Boyd agreed to keep him company, provided he could do some work on a book he was writing. Young Neal was going to join them later when he had his holiday. The elegant Evelyn was going for a cruise down the Mediterranean with Freddy Duke and some of her friends, and, as Mallard said with a shrug of his shoulders, why not ?

He had been prosecuting counsel in two murder trials which filled the newspapers for a time, and he had defended a Cabinet Minister in a long and tedious libel action. He had given counsel's opinion in many cases. Only a few personal friends and a Judge of Appeal noticed that he had lost some of his vivacity and looked worn and rather melancholy now and then. It was also remarked at the Bath Club that he did not turn up now for his usual game of squash, which he had played with such dash and zest.

" What can you expect ? " asked one of them of a man who had commented on his absence. " With all those big cases—to say nothing of his work in Chambers—it's a wonder he has time to eat. Did you hear his address to the jury in that murder case ? Brilliant ! Devastating ! That swine was as good as hanged after Mallard had been going ten minutes."

" Oh, yes, he's brilliant," said the other man, who happened to be a well-known novelist. " All the same " —he laughed mysteriously—" he's not above our little human weaknesses. You know the Jaffrey girl who was playing in Carfew's comedy at the St. James's ? Yes, charming, I agree. Mallard thinks so too. He has planted her in a cottage near his country house. I hear his wife is going to sue for a divorce. Well, it's the way of the world ! "

Boyd overheard that conversation. He made himself distinctly rude to the well-known novelist and frightened him into a complete withdrawal.

It was true, however, that Rose Jaffrey had taken a house—rather more than a cottage—not far from Mallard's place and was living there with her distinguished old father who had been a great actor in his time. It was either a coincidence or a great indiscretion, and Boyd was not sure which.

Before going down into the country, less than forty miles from town anyhow, Mallard had some strange psychological experiences, and Boyd heard about them from young Neal and occasionally from Mallard himself, who was never very secretive and could not help talking about himself because of his unfailing interest in his own personality.

Sometimes when he was pleading in court before a judge or jury he had a curious feeling that the scene in which he was taking part was just an illusion, and utterly unreal. He heard his own voice speaking but it did not seem to belong to him. More often he was overcome by the futility and falsity of it all—his simulated passion over the defence or prosecution of some criminal, his sham indignation with his brother counsel on a point of law, the ponderous summing-up of the judge and his stern, unmerciful words when delivering sentence. What did these things matter ? Life was only a phantasm. If there were no future life more real than this it was absurd to make a fuss about such trivialities, such illusions of the mind and senses. Perhaps the whole code of law was founded upon false psychology and moral shams. If there were no future life it might be more sensible for a man to steal what he wanted, to kill the man he disliked, to go off with any woman he desired, instead of obeying some self-imposed morality which had no authority behind it and led to—nothing. Of course, if one believed in God. . . .

He wished to goodness he could believe in God. Religion had never been in his line, even at school. He preferred games. After those Eton days he had seldom given religion a thought, deciding definitely that he had no belief in revelation and that there was no evidence

which would hold good in a court of law for Christianity or any other creed. The code of a gentleman had been good enough for him. Playing the game had been his highest moral law, and it worked out pretty well. That, and a dislike of cruelty and meanness and caddishness, *plus* perhaps an absorption in his own ambitions. No time for womanizing, and silly stuff like that, even when Evelyn had cooled off and taken her own line.

Now he would give his right hand to be sure of survival, with a certain faith. More than his right hand—that was an absurd way of putting it. His life, rather, and gladly.

Angina pectoris. A sudden snuffing out. To-morrow, next week, a year or two at most. That doctor fellow had told him that, and the specialist he had seen afterwards. His heart was all ends up. A lesion, they called it. A sudden gust of anger, a stumble down a slippery step, a run to catch a train—any little thing like that and he would no longer exist in this life, which he liked a good deal.

Incredible! . . . Once in court he was conscious of his right hand making some dramatic gesture. "Funny!" he thought. "That hand of mine, so sensitive, so responsive to my brain, will be a dead still thing, a bit of mouldering clay, when I get that last jolt. This brain of mine, so quick to take a point, so impatient of that mumbling old judge, so crammed with ideas, facts, impressions, memories—very pleasant, most of them!—will come to a full stop. Like a petrol engine without juice. Stone dead. . . ."

He had stopped in his argument, interested in that line of thought, absorbed in it, until suddenly he was aware of the judge's voice, and a nudge from his junior, and a surprised look on the face of the foreman of the jury.

"If you are feeling unwell, Mr. Mallard——"

"Not at all, m'Lord. Begging your pardon, m'Lord."

With a mental effort he had picked up the thread of his argument again.

Rose Jaffrey came into his mind sometimes when he stood in court cross-questioning some frightened witness. It was during a murder trial that he caught himself smiling as his gaze strayed from the jury box with those twelve silent, dull-eyed men and wandered to where a

shaft of sunlight came through the high window above the colour-washed walls.

She had asked him whether he minded because she had taken a little house near his. She had seen it advertised and had gone down with her father, who had fallen in love with it. . . . Whether he minded! . . . She wasn't playing anywhere in July and August. She would be near him when he went down with Boyd. They would meet sometimes on the heath, or in the quiet woods, or in his garden. She would let him kiss her hand now and then, when they met or parted. Nothing more than that—but enough. He would hear her voice, the sweet low tone of it. He would see the laughter in her brown eyes, or that shy, serious look which gave him an ache in his heart. Two months, of summer in her dear neighbourhood. His last summer, worse luck. Almost certainly, unless he was extremely careful. Well, he would make the best of it with thankfulness. . . . Let's see—what on earth was this trial about? What the dickens was he saying to the jury? Oh, Lord, yes! . . . "If the prisoner had not changed his clothes——"

One afternoon he slipped away from his chambers, leaving a mass of papers to his juniors, and took a taxi-cab to Westminster Abbey. It was a sudden impulse. It would do him good, he thought, to sit under that old roof and listen to some music and perhaps hear a few prayers. He had a desire for conversion, a queer idea that he might see a blinding light making all things clear. God, and a future life in which he, Mallard, would still exist. He had once read a book about conversion by William James, the brother of Henry. He had had to mug it up for a case in which a faith-healer was sued by one of his former disciples. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*—and vastly interesting, intellectually. But intellect wasn't enough. One must have faith. How on earth people could get such a thing he had no idea. He was born sceptical and the law had increased his incredulity. There must be evidence. Proof.

He sat there in the old Abbey for the afternoon service. Gorgeous colour streamed through the rose

windows and struck athwart the tall grey pillars. Beyond there were dim vistas like forest glades. All English history had passed through this Abbey church —kings, heroes, saints, the beautiful women who were the mothers of England, vixens and strumpets, villains and blackguards, all the pageant, tragedy and triumph, of the past. All dead, all dead—and there, not far away, the Unknown Soldier. Ivo, perhaps! That brother of his to whom he had been devoted. Young Ivo, the gayest of their crowd, the most brilliant, with the soul of a poet and a heart of chivalry. Dead! All of them dead! In a little while he would be dead, too. How good to meet that crowd again! The old crowd. The boys of yesterday. God! . . . If only he could believe in God. . . .

They were singing anthems, and Mallard felt himself thrilled by the beauty of this music. They had sung such things in Eton Chapel—when he had read *The Three Musketeers* with his head bowed over his book, little devil!

The Dean of Westminster—yes, that was the Dean, with his long ascetic face—read something from the Old Testament. The lesson of the day, probably. Something about Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Why worry about those old birds at this time of day? What reference had they to the modern world? Jews. He had a silly prejudice against Jews. Good people, really. But why Abraham? What did Abraham mean to him —Adrian Mallard, K.C., with a heart that was all ends up? Immoral fellows, some of those early patriarchs and prophets. Any number of concubines. Now people made a fuss if he took a lady out to dinner at the Carlton twice in one week?

A boy and girl were sitting next to him. He glanced at them and saw that they were holding hands. God bless them! he thought, and then smiled at this prayer of his. On the other side was a hospital nurse, with bright eyes filled with mystical light. "She believes," he thought. "She has perfect faith in the next world. It helps her on night duty in the wards. I don't suppose death means much to her. Well, well."

He went out of Westminster Abbey feeling sad, after halting for a moment at the grave of the Unknown Soldier.

"Perhaps it's Ivo," he thought again. "They couldn't find him out there. . . . I wonder if that girl was faking? Rather wonderful if she wasn't faking. All doubts gone. A meeting across the bridge with dear old Ivo. I bet he'd laugh! Just as we used to when we met at holiday times—Eton and Harrow. There's nothing in immortality if our personalities don't survive. Nirvana is no damn' good to me. I am an egoist. I want to go on. I want to meet my pals again. . . . Who knows?"

One Sunday morning he went with young Neal to High Mass at the Oratory in the Brompton Road. The boy was vastly surprised when he suggested the idea.

"Interested?" he asked with his shy smile.

"Vastly," said Mallard. "I feel middle age creeping on me! Time I began to learn something about spiritual things. Out of my line, you know. I'm more knowledgeable on the subject of crime and every kind of horrible vice."

He hadn't said a word to Wilfred Neal about that silly heart of his. He wasn't going to cast a shadow over young minds just because he was under a sentence of death to be carried out at some uncertain date. He had had to lie a little about that game of squash. "Too busy, old lad!" But he was conscious that the boy glanced at him once or twice as though suspecting that something was "up."

It was the first time he had ever been into the Oratory. Rather a fine church, he thought. Extraordinarily crowded on a fine morning. Packed with women and girls sitting on the steps of confessional boxes, showing their pretty knees and not bothering. He and Neal stood some way up the aisle behind rush-bottomed chairs where they had a view of the altar. The priests were in crimson robes and there were a lot of little acolytes bobbing up and down, swinging censers, ringing little bells, very busy with themselves. The priests moved about the altar in a solemn, rhythmical way. Now and again one of their voices rang out in some old chant, answered by the choir which let itself go in rather splendid harmonies—just a trifle operatic, thought Mallard—while the organ pealed out, or throbbed on

low notes, or rose quivering to the *vox humana*. The scent of incense was sweet and strong. Not at all unpleasant. Mallard was struck by the reverence of the people—a well-dressed crowd with great numbers of smart women. They seemed utterly absorbed in what was going on, but it was difficult to follow their movements so as not to be conspicuous or seem irreverent. Mallard kept a wary eye on Neal and knelt down and stood up again as he did. But he was caught out several times. The boy and the whole congregation rose unexpectedly when they had only just knelt down. It was all rather mysterious. One old gentleman knelt on the hard stones and his gouty old knees fairly creaked when he rose again stiffly. Mallard offered him his rush-bottomed chair, but he said, "No, no," in quite a loud whisper.

There was a sermon from a young priest with a very good voice. He spoke eloquently and Mallard watched his gestures and studied his delivery with professional interest. He could give points to some barristers he knew. It was interesting, too. Mallard was impressed. He took as his text some sentence from the New Testament.

"Be sober and watch; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist ye, strong in faith, knowing that the same afflictions befalleth your brethren who are in the world."

He spoke of the lack of faith, that universal affliction which had overcome the modern world. It was the cause of all the unrest, the revolt, the disbelief in authority, the creeping despair which had invaded social life and the hearts of men and women. There was very little happiness in the modern world, though everybody was desperately eager for a "good time." There was not so much laughter as in the old days, though amusement was the order of the day. People went in search of pleasure but found only boredom. They struggled to get rich but wealth did not satisfy their hearts. They were discontented with life—and afraid of death. Bolshevism, and all forms of anarchy, were destroying the old traditions of discipline, and obedience, and Christian morality. Young people had no reverence for

their parents, or for old age, or experience ; no reverence for anything—not even for beauty ! Old people could not expect it from them if they themselves had no certain faith in Christ or His message to the world, no self-respect, no firm convictions. False science—not true science—had overthrown the foundations of spiritual belief and was seeking still further to deny a spiritual conception of life and the existence of God. What would be the end of all that ? Surely some new calamity —the overthrow of civilization itself. They were speeding toward it at a break-neck pace, heedlessly. No civilization can exist without faith in God's justice and a future life which would give a meaning to the human struggle. . . . " Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour "—and he was devouring the spiritual heritage of Christendom, and all human happiness. " Be strong in faith knowing that the same afflictions befalleth your brethren who are in the world."

Well, all that was quite true, about the need of faith. Mallard wanted faith himself, desperately. But what proof had this Church to offer, or any Church ? Undoubtedly Christ was historical. Undoubtedly Paul and his fellow apostles were quite sincere. They had died for their belief. But what proof was there of divine authority ? What evidence about the Resurrection, or miracles, or everlasting life ? They might have imagined all those things, or given a new twist to some old Jewish tradition derived from Oriental mysticism.

Besides, hadn't Roman Catholics done frightful things in history—violated the whole spirit of Christ's message ? In any case one would want terrific faith to believe in the Mass. . . . And marvellous humility to go into one of those boxes to confess one's sins. He wondered what happened inside those boxes. How did those priests make out that they could forgive sins ? Still, it wasn't a bad idea. It might keep people from going wrong. Most men and women, including himself, would be glad to get advice now and then from some wise old bird who knew all about life, and wouldn't blab.

At luncheon that day he spoke to young Neal.

" I envy you your faith, young fellow. Marvellous!

I'd give anything to have it. By the way, do you go to Confession and all that ? ''

Neal blushed and looked self-conscious.

'' Now and again. One has to once a year, you know. Of course I hate it, but it's nothing really. We call it ' the scrapes.' ''

'' What does that mean ? '' asked Mallard.

The boy laughed.

'' An old slang word ! ' Scraping the pot clean,' you know.''

'' I see,'' said Mallard.

He crumbled the bread at the side of his plate and was very thoughtful.

'' I suppose you don't funk death ? '' he asked presently.

Neal laughed again.

'' It's not a cheerful prospect. Still, when the time comes——''

'' Eternal life and all that,'' said Mallard lightly. '' No doubts, eh ? ''

'' Not many,'' said young Neal. '' What the Church says goes, as far as I'm concerned. Tradition, and all that. Not that I bother much.''

He shifted in his chair slightly and blurted out a friendly suggestion.

'' Of course, if you're interested, sir, you might have a pijaw with a priest. I know a rather decent cove—quite human, and tremendously intellectual. Just your sort, I should say.''

'' No,'' said Mallard quickly. '' Theology would scare me stiff. I don't know the first thing about it.''

'' Just as you like, sir,'' said young Neal. '' One of these days, perhaps——''

That was as far as they got, and Mallard was afraid of giving himself away to this boy. He would have to hide the secret of his rotten heart. *Camouflage*, as they used to say in time of war.

Then one evening he found himself wandering about London in a mood of the blackest melancholy. Evelyn had gone off to the Mediterranean and he had hoped she would have a good time. She had looked at him very queerly, with a kind of shame in her eyes, and had

suddenly put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him and said, "Sorry! . . . We've made a bit of a mess of it, haven't we?" She had waved her hand to him from the taxicab, and he knew somehow that it was her farewell to him. She wasn't coming back. She was going off with that swine Freddy Duke. Perhaps there would have to be a divorce. . . .

Yes, they had made a mess of it, as so many moderns did with marriage. Probably it was his fault a good deal. He had been far too self-absorbed. He hadn't given marriage a chance. He had put his career first—always and supremely first. And Evelyn had been hard and cold after their first days of love. She had done without him—seven years ago now—and there had been no comradeship between them. For years there had been a sense of loneliness in his heart, despite all his friends and his work and his success. A frightful mess of it they had made. A frightful mess! Now she had gone. She wasn't coming back again. He was alone under sentence of death. Evelyn's good-bye—the end of their adventure together—had given his heart a jolt. He could feel it pressing against his ribs. He would have to be careful.

He felt a drizzle of rain on his face. Where was he? He had walked across Westminster Bridge and was somewhere on the south side of the river. Kennington, he supposed, from the names on the trams. The shops were still open and drab people under umbrellas were crowded on the pavements waiting for trams to far places in the unknown suburbs. Unknown to him, except for motor drives out of town.

All this seething democracy—what did it stand for? What was the meaning of it? What purpose in life animated these people, beyond a mere animal existence and a struggle for life? Had they any faith or spiritual vision? He doubted it. There was a long queue outside a picture palace. Shop boys and girls, shabby men and women, standing there in the rain to see some appalling falsity which would seem to them like life. "*The Morals of a Millionaire*—starring Viola Victoria." What would they get out of that in the way of a key to this riddle of life? What comfort in their own little

troubles ? Perhaps two hours' forgetfulness of poverty and squalor. Well, he didn't blame them. It was worth while.

Where were those trams going to ? Brixton—that was where that photographer lived with his sister who had spoken about Ivo, who had pretended to speak in the voice of Ivo. Emery Jago—that was the fellow's name. . . . Supposing it *was* Ivo speaking. The spirit of Ivo, but unchanged. If he could get to know that he would not be haunted by this fear of death and annihilation. It would be a direct proof of the survival of personality. It wouldn't be a snuffing out into nothingness. Death would just be a passing on across the bridge, with Ivo and old pals on the other side. A wonderful thought, that ! Enormously comforting. Why not pay another visit and find out the truth of it ? Probably a fake, of course—rather squalid for a man like himself—but very interesting.

He followed a group of people into a tram marked " Brixton." An elderly woman jabbed him in the chest with a wet umbrella as she struggled past him eager for a seat. He was wedged between a girl in a damp waterproof and a young man reading the *Evening News* while he chewed the fag end of a cigarette which had gone out. A beery-looking fellow opposite stared at him steadily, perhaps surprised to see a man in a top hat and black coat in a tram-car bound for Brixton. " He probably thinks I'm an undertaker," thought Mallard.

" Is there a place called Electric Avenue, Brixton ? " he asked the conductor when he came round for the tickets.

The conductor glanced at him sharply, as though suspecting a jest. Then he winked at the beery man opposite and repeated the question.

" This gent wants to know if there's a place called Electric Avenue, Brixton."

The beery man gave a gurgle of amusement and said, " I don't think ! "

The woman who had jabbed Mallard with her wet umbrella smiled wanly and nudged an unknown neighbour.

" Tuppence," said the conductor, " and you'll know it by the glare of lights. . . . Can't miss it."

It was obviously the highway of pleasure and commerce in the suburb of Brixton. It was like asking if there is a place called Piccadilly, on the other side of the river.

"Electric Avenue!" shouted the conductor after they had been travelling and stopping for twenty minutes, with people getting in and people getting out, all damp and worried, with babies and parcels. There remained only one young man and woman who sat steadily at the end of the tram-car holding hands and whispering to each other with little squeals from the girl and nudges from the young man's elbow.

Mallard could not remember the name of the street he wanted. But he remembered the name of Emery Jago and asked for information from a policeman.

"Artist photographer," said the young constable. "Corner of Ezra Road, Mr. Mallard."

Mallard started at this recognition.

"How do you know that?" he asked sharply.

The young constable smiled blandly above his chin-strap.

"Saw you 'ere one night, sir! It's not often we get a Rolls-Royce this way. My inspector pointed you out. Ought to have known, of course. . . . Very interesting case, that, yesterday. The Lodging-house Murder. Not a shade of doubt he did it all right. Chopped 'er up, the dirty beast!"

"This way?" asked Mallard.

"Cuts across," said the constable. "Can't miss it, sir. The corner shop."

Mallard was annoyed at this recognition. But after all, what did it matter? What did anything matter?

He pushed open the door of the photographer's shop. A little bell rang and a girl came toward him. It was the same girl who had spoken as though possessed with the spirit of Ivo, pretty, with a doll-like face, dead white.

"Good evening," said Mallard courteously. "Is Mr. Jago in? I came here before, you know. One night, quite late."

The girl stared at him and then said, "Yes."

She called toward the back of the shop.

"Em! . . . Here's a gentleman to see you."

IV

It was six weeks since Mallard had come to this photographer's shop with Rose and Boyd and young Neal—after that supper at the Carlton when he hadn't felt well. Most of the time the room upstairs had been in darkness except for the little red lamp, but he remembered the face of Emery Jago when the man came towards him now from the parlour behind the shop—a curious kind of face, lean and pallid with dark and very luminous eyes, not unattractive or unintelligent.

He did not answer Mallard's greeting of "Good evening" but smiled slightly, showing rather bad teeth.

"We expected you," he said. "I told my sister you'd come. Didn't I, Belle?"

"Yes, Em," said the girl.

"How was that?" asked Mallard, rather startled by this expectation of his coming. "I had no idea of paying you a visit until half an hour ago. It was a sudden impulse."

"Your brother has been here again," said Emery. "Young Ivo. He's been asking for you."

He spoke as though Ivo were still alive and his way of saying it was strangely matter-of-fact.

For some moments Mallard was silent. Was this man a charlatan imposing on him, inventing this story about Ivo, lying in his throat? Surely a man couldn't be such a horrible blackguard as all that, at least without some sordid motive. It was hardly worth while for half a guinea, or whatever his fee was. Besides, he looked a decent fellow and that sister of his was a pretty little thing with innocent eyes.

"Can you give me any proof of what you say," he asked. "Without the most convincing proof I can't

believe in these things. It's all—incredible. To be quite frank, I don't believe a word of it."

"It seems incredible at first," said Emery. "It took me a long time before I was persuaded. I started as an agnostic. Didn't I, Belle?"

He glanced at Belle Chubb, whom he called his sister to avoid scandal, and she answered, "Yes, Em."

"At first," he explained with a kind of friendly candour, "one can't be sure that people aren't faking. Especially professional mediums. Many of them are low-class people. Then when one starts experimenting, one isn't sure that one isn't deceiving oneself, unconsciously of course, by auto-suggestion, or the subconscious mind. That's the trouble with table-turning and automatic writing. Afterwards, by degrees, one gets convinced. The spirits become more intimate, so to speak. They say things which no one could invent. They know things outside one's range of information. Isn't that so, Belle?"

"It seems like it," said Belle.

"This fellow speaks rather well," thought Mallard. "It sounds plausible—except that the whole thing is preposterous. Why should the spirits come to a photographer's shop in Brixton? Why should Ivo come here? No, there can't be any truth in it. It's unreasonable and absurd. Much easier to believe in Catholicism, or some creed with tradition and dignity behind it. This squalid little shop in a London suburb as the bridge between time and eternity—the rendezvous of immortal souls! How utterly ridiculous!"

That fellow Emery Jago seemed to read his thoughts and answered them surprisingly, as if Mallard had said them aloud.

"They make use of people like me just as you pick up a telephone receiver and ring up a number. We mediums are only sensitive instruments—microphones, so to speak. It's no virtue in *us*. It's just because we were born with rather more acute perceptions to the mysterious vibrations of time and space than most people. We possess certain supernormal faculties which everybody has to a certain extent but doesn't

develop or use in any way. Probably we're neurotics, really!"

He laughed when he made that admission, showing his bad teeth again.

"That's why the spirits can make use of us," he suggested. "Their spiritual telephones. At least that's my theory, though I don't dogmatize about it. It's all a mystery."

Mallard was again impressed by the man's well-educated speech and by his easy way of explanation, not forcing his argument or laying claim to any supernatural powers. At least not to any special authority. He "didn't dogmatize."

"You say that my brother has been asking for me?" said Mallard.

Emery Jago nodded.

"Several times. He interrupts other spirit voices and says, 'Tell my brother Adrian that Ivo is asking for him. Why doesn't he come?'"

"When was that?" asked Mallard.

Emery Jago turned to the girl.

"When was the last time young Ivo spoke?"

Belle Chubb hesitated and seemed to be pondering.

"I'm sure I can't say. All those voices——"

"Oh, yes, you can say," said Emery rather sharply. "Think, Belle. You keep the notes. You've got him down under 'Ivo.'"

"Last Friday," said Belle. "I remember now. It was after Black Eagle had been through."

Mallard was a little shocked by this familiar reference to his brother. It seemed rather horrible that this photographer in Brixton should refer to his brother as "young Ivo" and that they should have him down in their notes, his fastidious, aristocratic Ivo, who had been one of the æsthetics of Oxford till he went out to the war and lived in lousy trenches and was killed somewhere out in No Man's Land. Well, that was snobbishness. On the other side—if there was an other side—there would be no distinction of classes. Brixton would have as good a place as Mayfair in the heavenly mansions. Perhaps rather better, if one came to think of it.

He came back to the man's previous words. There

was one point he had missed at the time. How did he know that Ivo's brother was Adrian ?

He asked the question.

" How did you know my name was Adrian ? "

Emery smiled out of those dark eyes of his.

" He called you that night you were here. Don't you remember ? He said, ' Hullo, Adrian ! ' "

" Do you know who I am ? " asked Mallard, searching him with that steely look that had often overawed a witness.

" Yes," said Emery, frankly. " Adrian Mallard, K.C. Ivo told us."

" You are sure it wasn't a constable in Electric Avenue ? " asked Mallard sternly.

" A constable ? "

Emery laughed and turned to Belle Chubb who smiled back at him in her timid way.

" We're not very friendly with police constables. They put us in the same class as fortune-tellers, to say nothing of rogues and vagabonds. Of course, in a way we are —I mean, fortune-tellers. Belle does a bit of crystal-gazing. Clairvoyance, you know."

The man had an engaging frankness which was rather pleasing.

For a moment or two Mallard was thoughtful again. He could hardly bring himself to ask this man to summon up the spirit of Ivo again. It seemed rather—well—degrading. He would hate it to be known that he, Adrian Mallard, K.C., was sneaking round to mediums and trying to get into touch with the other world. There was something shameful about it. Squalid. And yet that was what he had come for. He might as well go through with it, as a matter of curiosity. No doubt it was all a fraud.

" Look here ! " He spoke nervously, after staring down at the bare boards. " I suppose you couldn't get into touch with that brother of mine. I imagine you must have a group of people holding hands and all that. These things don't work alone, do they ? "

" We don't put it that way," said Emery, smiling. " That sounds like a conjuring trick. As a matter of fact, it's easier with a group. Better results always.

They form a chain of psychic energy. But sometimes I can get into touch when there's only one or two. Belle here helps a good deal. Her presence seems to attract the spirits. You see, she's in tune with it all, so to speak. If you care to come upstairs——"

Mallard went upstairs with a guilty feeling. Adrian Mallard, K.C.! What would his learned friends say if they could see him going up this staircase in a back shop at Brixton which smelled of fried fish and chips and cheap linoleum, with two mediums who were probably a disreputable couple. Two months ago before that heart of his had kicked like a mule—curse it!—it would have been impossible. He would as soon have gone to a disorderly house or a Chinese opium den.

He stood in the same room where he had been with Rose, and Boyd, and young Wilfred. It looked even more squalid now that the last light of a wet grey evening came through the windows. That ghastly wallpaper looked even more appalling. The black curtains were made of cheap plush frayed at the edges.

The pale-faced girl—Belle, as the man called her—asked him to take a chair and explained that they would have to make the room dark.

"It's always a nuisance," she said rather kindly.

"That's all right," said Mallard.

"We'll have the red lamp," said Emery. "Is there any oil in it, Belle?"

"I'll fill it," she answered.

Before pulling down the blinds the man took the little red lamp off the pedestal and went through the black curtains. The girl followed him and Mallard was left alone for a few minutes. He could smell a reek of oil and thought he heard some whispering going on.

"Probably arranging some trick," he thought. "What a fool I am! What intellectual weakness! It's my infernal egoism again. I want to believe that personality survives. I want an excuse for belief."

They came back presently with the lighted lamp and Belle pulled down the window blinds and darkened the room by drawing a pair of curtains across the window. The lamp hardly glimmered on its pedestal.

Emery Jago made some explanation.

"We'll try the luminous trumpet. We've had some good results lately. The spirits speak through it."

"What sort of a trumpet?" asked Mallard, and his voice was resonant in that dark bare room.

"Oh, it's just a tin thing," said Emery. "A cheap type of gramophone horn. Have a look at it."

He turned up the lamp so that it gave a little more light and handed a tin trumpet to Mallard who examined it. There was nothing special about it. A cheap gramophone horn, as the man had said.

"We put it on that table over there," said Emery. "If things go well—of course I can't guarantee anything—you'll see it rise and move about in a rhythmic sort of way. Then a spirit begins to speak through it. It needs patience. Half an hour, sometimes."

"Oh, lord!" thought Mallard.

The man turned down the lamp again after placing the trumpet on the table at the end of the room. The girl Belle sat on a chair against the wall opposite Mallard, a yard or so from the table. He could just see her dimly. Emery Jago sat in front of the black curtains farthest away from the table where the trumpet lay.

"We must go into the silence," he said.

It was a long, intense silence. It seemed interminable to Mallard. It must have lasted twenty minutes, and during that time a long chain of thoughts passed through his mind—all sorts of queer things from youth upwards to his first meeting with Rose Jaffrey. He had fallen in love with her at once. She was so exquisite and gay and fresh. There was an instant sympathy between them. Never a word of love had passed between them though she must have seen it in his eyes. He had made up his mind that never a word of love would pass his lips. He wouldn't drag her into any dirty divorce case. In any case he was too old for her. Once he had been frightfully tempted to take her in his arms, to kiss her lips and say, "My dear, my dear!" The romantic forties! No, he would play the game according to his code. He mustn't be a cad. Now with this heart of his, and death calling, there was more need for silence. Death calling. . . .

That trumpet was beginning to move. It was

luminous round the lip of it with some sort of phosphorescence. It looked as if it were struggling to rise from the table and gave a few spasmodic jerks but fell back again. Very strange, thought Mallard. Rather devilish in a way. He could feel his scalp tighten with a sense of—well, hardly fear—but uneasiness. It was quite impossible for that fellow Jago or the girl to be touching the thing. It was well beyond their reach and he could see their dim forms in the darkness, motionless.

The trumpet was moving again. This time the phosphorescent ring round its mouth made a sudden swerve above the table and came round in a half circle. It seemed to hover and then completed the circular sweep and rose again in a kind of spiral. In the darkness, almost complete, it was difficult to judge the distance it was above the table. Sometimes it seemed almost as high as the ceiling, but that may have been an optical illusion. It was certainly well off the table, the surface of which gleamed slightly.

The mouth of the thing, that luminous ring, steadied and turned full circle toward Mallard. A voice spoke through it in a rather faint metallic and resonant tone, like someone speaking through a megaphone a long way off.

"Hullo, Adrian! I've been waiting——"

It sounded like that but the vowel sounds were not clear, as on a loud speaker when the battery runs down.

Mallard shifted his chair a little nearer but at the sound of his chair sliding an inch or two on the bare boards Jago's voice broke the silence in a low stern tone.

"Keep still!"

The trumpet had dropped again to the table. It seemed as if Mallard's quick movement had broken the spell, or the contact, or whatever they called it. Three minutes passed at least before he saw the phosphorescent ring rise again. Then he heard the voice speaking again, as through a megaphone across a wide field.

"Why didn't you come before, old boy? . . . I'd like to have a yarn now and then . . . like we used to in the old days . . . Perhaps you're too busy with all

your legal work . . . Forgetful of your pals who have passed on. . . ."

There were distinct pauses between each sentence, and the voice became a little louder after the first few words. Was it anything like Ivo's voice? Mallard listened intently for the old familiar ring, rather high and tired. It was a slight affectation of Ivo's. He had always spoken in a tired way as though talking were rather a bore. No, he couldn't detect that. It was rather like a young man's voice, a boy's but made metallic by the trumpet.

"Ask questions," said Emery Jago in a low tone.

Mallard thought hard for a moment. Was it quite right to lend himself to this sort of thing? Wasn't it rather indecent and shameful? Probably these two people were just fooling him, although he could not guess how they made that trumpet move about beyond their reach.

"Tell me something," he said, "that only you and I know. Something hidden from the gossip-mongers."

There was silence for a few seconds, as though the "spirits" were thinking. It was curious and uncanny, that awareness of someone thinking. Then the voice said one word.

"Rose!"

Mallard started in his chair as though he had been shot. That name spoken very clearly through the trumpet seemed to tear a secret out of his brain. It was impossible, unbelievable anyhow, that these two low-class mediums should know anything about his hidden love for Rose Jaffrey. Boyd had told him that people had been talking, that there had been a paragraph, without names but very suggestive, in one of the evening papers. That stuff about "one of our brilliant K.C.'s and a talented actress." But that sort of scandal didn't travel to Brixton. It was not the kind of thing that would be known to a long-haired photographer with dirty finger nails.

And in any case, Ivo hadn't known Rose Jaffrey. Mallard himself had not met her until four years after Ivo's death. Of course if it were really a spirit speaking from the other side——

"Who is Rose?" he asked, trying to control his nerves. He was thankful that the room was dark, so that the deep hot flush of his face could not be seen.

A laugh rang out through the tin trumpet, that luminous disc which swept in a circle through the darkness.

"Her hair has a glint of bronze," said the voice. "She is very beautiful. She is a famous lady. Watch your step, Adrian. Watch your step, old boy."

Mallard felt rather faint. This room was close; there was no air in it. He felt a cold moisture break out on his forehead and in the palms of his hands. It was silly, this sudden dizziness.

He spoke into the darkness.

"I feel rather unwell. . . . A little faint."

The luminous trumpet swooped down and fell with a frightful clatter on the floor.

The girl spoke to Emery Jago.

"Better turn up the lights, Em?"

"Yes," said Emery.

It was the girl who moved to the switch and turned up the light which was dazzling—almost blinding—after that darkness to which their eyes had become accustomed.

Belle Chubb crossed the room quickly to Mallard and looked at him anxiously.

"It's the darkness," she said, "and that trumpet. Would you like a glass of water? . . . Or I could make you a cup of tea in two ticks. No trouble!"

"It was foolish of me," said Mallard. "No, I won't drink anything, thanks. I'm afraid I'll have to be going."

He wiped the cold sweat off his forehead. Hair with the glint of bronze, that voice had said. A famous lady . . . Rose . . . It was very startling.

"A pity you felt upset," said Jago, looking at Mallard, "just when it was getting so interesting. You must come again, sir. Young Ivo was going strong."

He picked up the tin trumpet which had crashed to the floor and rolled a little way so that it lay under the table.

"Dented a bit," he remarked carelessly. "Well,

that doesn't matter. It only cost eighteenpence in Electric Avenue."

Mallard handed him a couple of pound notes.

"That will pay for a new one and the trouble I've given you," he said coldly.

"Much obliged," answered Jago. "Half a guinea is our usual fee. We're not interested in the money side of these experiences, except that we have to keep alive."

Mallard stared him straight in the eyes.

"If I thought you were tricking me—using my brother's name——"

Perhaps he was going to say that Emery Jago would not keep alive much longer, but he checked his words and brushed the nap of his tall hat on his sleeve in an absent-minded way.

Emery Jago ignored his threat altogether, as though he had not heard it.

"That was queer about that lady with the bronze hair," he said thoughtfully. "A famous lady, too. Do you identify her at all, Mr. Mallard?"

"That is not for me to say," answered Mallard quietly.

Emery Jago shrugged his shoulders slightly and smiled.

"Exactly as you like. We get best results when inquirers take us into their confidence. Nothing that passes in this room ever goes further. It's like the seal of confession. Anyhow, I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing you again, Mr. Mallard. You might like to test little Belle's clairvoyance. It's very wonderful. She sees the future very clearly. Don't you, Belle?"

The girl didn't answer, and he repeated his question.

"Don't you, Belle?"

"Sometimes," she answered timidly.

"These things are uncanny," said Mallard. "I'm not at all convinced——"

Emery Jago laughed amiably.

"No one ought to be convinced after one or two experiences. Only very simple souls have credulity like that, and their judgment isn't worth having. It's a question of evidence. Proof positive. Circumstantial evidence, I think you would call it, Mr. Mallard."

"Sure you wouldn't like a cup of tea?" asked Belle again. "No trouble at all. Really."

"I'll say good evening," said Mallard. "I trust you not to mention my name at all. I may come again—possibly. But please don't expect me."

"No names are ever mentioned," said Emery Jago. "And any time you drop round we shall be glad to see you, sir. Young Ivo will be disappointed if you fail to come—but that of course depends upon your judgment in the matter. We're not proselytizers."

Mallard was shown downstairs by Belle Chubb.

"Feeling better?" she asked in a friendly, sympathetic way. "Came over sick like, didn't you? I used to be took like that myself before I got used to this sort of thing."

"Poor little creature!" thought Mallard. "What a strange and terrible life for her—true or untrue!"

He answered gently.

"I felt a little faint, that's all. Thanks for your offer of a cup of tea, but the fresh air will put me all right."

"There's a tram at the corner," she told him.

He went out into Ezra Road and strode into Electric Avenue with its glare of shop windows and its crowded pavements.

Could it possibly have been Ivo? . . . That voice speaking through the luminous trumpet? . . . The name of Rose . . . the glint of bronze in her hair . . . What was the explanation of this uncanny stuff? If it were true it would solve all doubts about the survival of personality. He could face death with greater courage. He must find out the truth of it at all costs. He must get Boyd to help him. Boyd's sceptical scientific mind would help him to get at the truth of all this—or the falsity. Anyhow, it was an extraordinary hit they had made—that mention of Rose. Perhaps it was mental telepathy. He had been thinking of her in the darkness there, during that long silence. Perhaps they had picked up his thoughts somehow. Miraculous in any case. He stood outside a shop where a man in a white apron was selling meat to a group of women.

"Fine tender pork. Wonderful eating! Now, missus . . ."

What a queer business, all this! Life and death. Hard to make head or tail of it. All these people with their little minds busy with the struggle of existence. What did it lead to? What purpose did they serve?

"A fat mutton chop for a 'ard-working 'usband. Tender and juicy. Just the thing for poor old Dad. Now mother . . ."

Mallard stood where the trams passed down Brixton High Road and looked for a taxicab. But he had to take a tram in which he sat pensively between a painted woman and a Salvation Army lass who before the journey ended slipped a tract into his hand. It asked him whether he was sure of salvation—and he wasn't.

V

MALLARD'S house in Surrey lay south of the Hog's Back, seven miles or so on the far side of Guildford, away from the main tides of traffic which poured along the Portsmouth road and the way to Winchester, through Farnham, on high days and holidays. It was a peaceful oasis of heaths and commons and woodland, not yet reached by the creeping rash of bungalows and villas which was beginning to spoil Hindhead and had already spoiled so great a part of the loveliest county in England. But looking from his terrace above the tennis lawn there was no sign of bricks and mortar, or red roofs, or any ugliness. The view was a far vista of heavy foliage, heathery common land, and, here and there, a cultivated field stretching away to the old Punchbowl and beyond to the far dim purple distanee of the South Downs.

Mallard had bought his house for Evelyn who had fallen in love with it when they had picnicked on the common outside its gates, with his Rolls-Royce in the bracken near by, two years after their marriage. It was a modern house but built in the old style—the William and Mary Period—with a red-brown roof, deep over its shuttered windows, and tall chimneys. The glory of the place, to a town-dwelling man like Mallard with a sense of beauty, was a belt of sturdy, full-grown oaks round the thirteen acres of garden and paddock, and that woodland beyond, and the open view.

Evelyn had spent a few summers there directing the gardeners, crowding the lawns at week-ends with all the people who had called on them from a radius of fifteen miles—sometimes there was an alarming number of expensive motor-cars in the drive—and amusing

herself fairly well at tennis parties, garden parties, and bridge parties in Surrey houses.

Then she had tired of it all, complaining that Mallard seldom came down because of his work—which was perfectly true—and alleging infinite boredom with retired colonels and their ladies, ancient admirals and their tennis-playing daughters, elderly maiden ladies devoted entirely to small dogs and herbaceous borders, and old country gentlemen, very poor, very proud of their pedigrees, deeply resentful of democracy, *chars-à-bancs*, picnic parties, short frocks, and the Bolshevism of the age. Not that Evelyn was democratic, though alarmingly modern. She was only bored stiff with flowers and birds and green lawns and two wet summers, and herself. So the house had hardly been used lately, except for occasional week-ends.

Yet it had never looked so charming as when Mallard went down there with Professor Boyd at the beginning of the Long Vacation. The gardeners had mown the lawns ready for his coming, and the tennis court was marked out temptingly. (Never again to play tennis! thought Mallard.) The long pergola was an avenue of rambler roses after a late spring and rainy June, and the strong sweet scent of carnations rose up to the gravelled terrace. In the Dutch garden, as they called it, with its crazy paving and rock plants, Evelyn's delphiniums were tall and wonderful in the bed along the stone wall. The young shrubs they had planted at their first coming had grown tall along the drive and the fruit garden called to the lustful soul of Boyd—that was his way of putting it—because of all the raspberries and red currants under wire netting. A summer haze lay over Hindhead and the distant line of high ground. In the copse behind the belt of oak trees wood pigeons were cooing. Bees were busy in the catmint which poured its purple splendour down the terrace wall. A cuckoo with a broken voice at the end of its English sojourn called huskily across the common, and a woodpecker laughed in a near bush. "Laughing at life," thought Mallard. "The jester!"

After the law courts, and London, everything seemed wonderfully quiet, fragrant, refreshing, and exquisite.

The beauty of this country place, so near to town and yet so remote, touched Mallard's senses with a strange and almost painful poignancy. It was as though he were more aware of life than he had ever been before—now that he was under sentence of death. He had always loved England with an insular passion and prejudice. He had loved gardens like this with their smooth mown lawns, and especially their tennis courts where he had played good games with Ivo and other boys before the war, from which he had escaped because the law had needed him and wouldn't let him go. He had loved the old villages, deep-cut lanes with overhanging trees, good golf courses with room to lift a straight ball, but all as a pleasant background to his own brilliant and successful personality. He had been a decorative and distinguished figure in these scenes.

But now this life of Nature thrilled him with a sharper emotion. He perceived it with a new vision, as though he were looking at things for the first time—the light on a clump of trees with dark shadows beneath, the exquisite green of young poplars there on the edge of his field, the colours of flowers—what a deep astounding blue, those delphiniums!—and the sunlight lying on the lawn with the shadow of the trellis-work down one side. He satisfied his sense of touch by feeling the warmness of the sun upon the stones of the terrace wall. He bent over the standard roses and took deep breaths of their scent, and pinched the leaves of burrage or lavender and loved the perfume of those old herbs.

"One doesn't smell these things enough," he said to Boyd. "One doesn't use one's senses nearly enough. One misses half the gifts of life."

It was as though he were greedy for this life and all the beauty of it, lest he should miss any of its loveliness. He went out alone on the first night away from town and stood on the terrace while Boyd was unpacking his clothes upstairs. The moon was at three-quarters in a clear, cloudless sky still faintly blue at ten o'clock. The garden was filled with a milky luminance. Away on Hindhead a light was gleaming, and presently overhead an airplane came with its deep, humming drone and passed across the sky like a black bat. Birds were still

twittering in the hedges before settling down for the night. There was a rich chuckling note—from a blackbird, perhaps. As a town-dweller most of his time, Mallard did not know much about these things. There were little odd noises to which he listened intently. A young owl gave a monotonous cry. Below the terrace some small beastie ran across the grass—a field-mouse very likely which would be caught by that owl. The air was drenched with the scent of carnations. Mallard's cigar had gone out. He stood there motionless, listening, looking, smelling, with all his senses alert.

"Life!" he said presently, aloud. "Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!"

He was stricken with the thought that soon he would neither see, nor smell, nor listen, nor touch, nor know any more of this beauty. He was like that little field-mouse which had scuttled across the grass. Death would make its pounce, suddenly, swiftly, and there was no chance of escape for mice or men. Was there any reason to suppose that there would be another kind of life for field-mouse or Mallard?

"I can't believe that I shall end," thought Mallard. "It seems so futile. This ego of mine, this consciousness of beauty, this awareness of life—surely they mean something more than a shadow falling across the field? Or is this world just moonshine—the great illusion?"

He stared up at the moon and beyond the moon into that pale blueness.

VI

He went round to Rose Jaffrey's house on the following afternoon. It was less than half a mile away down a lane to the right of his own gate past two fields and the woodland behind his own place. Some gipsies were camped in a field on the other side of the lane. He could see the top of an old "spigot" caravan and a tent like a Red Indian wigwam. A baby was wailing and a woman's voice cursed it in some gibberish. As he passed, a young head with dark bright eyes like a fawn's appeared above the hedge and called out, "What's the time, please?"

"Five o'clock," shouted Mallard, and passed on thinking how strange it was that these wandering folk of Asiatic origin—wasn't their language the oldest in the world?—should be still living as nomads, utterly hostile to modern civilization, apart from it. Perhaps it was these people who had brought over half-forgotten traditions—all that strange Oriental, occult stuff which had been revived in modern spiritualism and superstition. Crystal-gazing, fortune-telling, and so on. Perhaps Emery Jago and that white-faced girl in Brixton had learned some of their tricks or acquired some of their gifts. He had been shaken by that last visit of his. It kept him awake at night wondering if it were really Ivo who had spoken. . . . He would have to tell Boyd about it. . . .

Rose Jaffrey's house was at the bottom of the lane where it petered out into a sandy track through the woodland. It was an enchanting old place which had once been the dower house of the lord of the manor round here, not very big but most attractive with its three gables and creeper-covered walls and casement

windows. The date was there above the doorway. Sixteen hundred and something. After Elizabeth's time. It was all enclosed in a low grey wall, ivy-clad, and an iron gate led to a flagged pathway between tall hollyhocks.

Rose was standing there waiting for him. She was in a frock of sprigged muslin such as might have been worn by one of the daughters of this house centuries ago. The afternoon sun touched the bronze of her hair.

"I saw you through the window," she said. "You looked very thoughtful!"

"I'm always thinking. A distressing and foolish habit!"

They both smiled and Mallard raised her hand to his lips.

"The country suits you," he told her. "It's a good background for you. . . . And this old house."

To that she answered by a little curtsey, with a "Thank you, kind sir."

She confessed that she never wanted to see London again as long as there was a flower in bloom, and that she was enchanted with every nook and corner of the house, and that the garden was a little paradise.

"I'm getting the smell of grease paint out of my nostrils," she said. "Carnations are so much sweeter!"

They went up the flagged pathway and Mallard paused to pluck a white pink. "Old England is in its scent," he said. "A thousand summers, and young life in English flower gardens."

She took the flower from him and put it in his buttonhole.

"Those are pretty words," she said. "I like you for them. . . ."

They went into the house and through the hall to a white panelled room where her father was reading a book in the window seat.

"Father," said Rose Jaffrey, "here is Mr. Adrian Mallard."

It was the first time Mallard had met him off the stage, though as a boy he had seen him many times in Shakespearean plays and had thrilled to his words as Henry V, and Julius Cæsar, and Shylock in the *Merchant of Venice*. A great actor, then, but now getting old and thin and

withered, yet still a fine, handsome figure with a long, delicate, finely cut face, and a shock of white hair and lustrous eyes. Sixty, perhaps.

He rose from the window seat and clasped Mallard's hand.

"My little Rose tells me you have been very kind to her," he said. "As her father I offer you my thanks, and look forward to your friendship, sir."

He spoke the words sonorously, with a touch of the old actor's declamatory style.

"We are neighbours," said Mallard. "As I am a lonely man that is a very pleasant thought."

Unconsciously he adopted Jaffrey's formal style of address.

"Ah!" said John Jaffrey, with an exaggerated gloom. "Loneliness! That, my dear sir, is the biggest tragedy of life to a man like myself who once lived for applause—before my health broke down. Even now, approaching the sere and yellow leaf, I sadly miss the noise of the groundlings, the cheers that swept up to me when I made an exit, the stir of a great audience when I appeared on the stage. It was the very breath of my nostrils, all that. . . . Well, well, my dear daughter carries on the old tradition of our name and I live again in her good repute."

"Another egoist!" thought Mallard. "A man who lived on his personality. I wonder if he is reconciled to this retirement and the idea of death. He, too, is sentenced to death. A few years or more, perhaps. We are all sentenced to death. This world is a hospital for incurables. That's a frightful thought."

Aloud he said, "I remember your farewell to the stage. It was a great night, sir."

Mr. Jaffrey's eyes were suffused with a mist of tears quite suddenly.

"A wonderful night!" he said. "A great memory! They called me back—was it fifty times? I wept and they were weeping—their favourite's farewell from the footlights. My funeral, sir. I am now one of the living dead."

Rose took his arm and laid her cheek against his shoulder.

"No, no, Father! You are still a great teacher. The younger school owes a lot to you. And if it weren't for your ill-health——"

"Yes," said Mr. Jaffrey with a sigh of resignation. "My health broke down, Mr. Mallard. Nervous prostration. I wore myself out before my time. That's the penalty of art. One puts one's passion into it, one's emotion, one's soul. The spirit wears out the body."

"I understand," said Mallard. He was tempted to ask the old actor whether he believed in the survival of the spirit. He was getting morbid. It was becoming an *idée fixe*—that yearning for survival.

And John Jaffrey answered him as though he had heard this unasked question.

"After all, the body doesn't matter. The spirit is everything, and when it shuffles off this mortal coil it will begin a new adventure in the world to come, unhampered by this poor husk of ours."

"My father has worked out a religion of his own," said Rose Jaffrey with a little secret smile. "I can't quite follow it but I think Shakespeare is his prophet. It sounds quite nice and very much like Christianity, except that he hates all the churches."

"Perfectly true, Rose!" said her father, smiling for a moment. "Shakespeare was one of the world's great prophets. He detested the narrow dogmas of conflicting creeds—a plague on both your houses!—but he loved beauty, kindness, justice, laughter, and all the loveliness of life. He believed in the immortality of the spirit and the eternal goodness of God."

"What proof had he of all that?" asked Mallard quietly. "What authority does he offer us?"

"Proof?" asked John Jaffrey. "My dear sir, the proof lies in every play he wrote. He is his own authority. He knew life from the earth up to the stars. He knew all the secrets of the human heart. He had agonized, wept, suffered. He had loved and hated. He had searched into the eternal mysteries, and stood upon the hill-tops touched by the wisdom of the splendour of God."

Mallard listened respectfully. He saw Rose's smiling eyes but was careful not to smile back at her lest her

father should see. "This is a new religion to me," he thought. "Shakespeare, eh? Saint William of Stratford! Well, I seem to remember some rather bawdy things written under his hand and name."

They had tea in that white panelled room, with bowls of flowers on gateleg tables. Rose sat in one of the window seats, with the tea-table in front of her and a casement window behind her giving a glory to her hair in the golden light of the afternoon. Once or twice she noticed Mallard's eyes upon her, as though her beauty held them, and a little smile played about her lips and her eyelashes hid secret thoughts.

Mallard noticed that her father lit one cigarette from another as he sat in a low chair with his thin legs crossed.

"A dangerous habit, that," said Mallard. "Not good for the heart, sir!"

"My one remaining vice," said Jaffrey. "Not very harmful and most comforting."

"I've had to cut down on it," said Mallard.

"Good heavens, yes!" cried Rose. "I've been wondering at some change in you. It's half an hour since you smoked a cigarette."

So she had noticed some change in him. He was conscious of this change since that night when Death had knocked at the door with a grisly warning. He had lost some of his vivacity, his verbosity, his easy way of laughter. He had become graver, older, more silent. He would have to watch that. He mustn't give himself away or go about with a long face.

He watched it now, and plunged into a description of his last case. The foreman of the jury was a comic character and argued with the judge. There had been a most amusing scene, which he described to the delight of Rose's father who laughed heartily and said that Mallard would have made a good actor.

But that pantomime of his—in his old style—did not deceive Rose Jaffrey. Later, at least, when they walked round the garden together and then sat on a wooden bench below a withered oak she spoke again of a change in him.

"Has anything happened? Or is it the strain of cutting off Virginia cigarettes?"

"Nothing much has happened," he said. "Evelyn's

done a bunk. At least, I don't expect her back from that cruise with Freddy Duke. She piped her eye a little when she went away and said, 'Sorry for everything.' That meant good-bye."

"I'm sorry," said Rose. "Poor Evelyn and poor you."

Mallard laughed quietly.

"Oh, it hasn't broken my heart or anything like that. We've been 'going our own ways'—as one reads in Divorce Court letters—too long to feel any shock of parting. Still, one looks back with a sense of failure, and that's never pleasant, especially to an egoist like me. We loved each other quite nicely for a time. Just wrongly matched, that's all."

"Yes," said Rose.

She did not deny that he was an egoist, as he had rather hoped. She was always alarmingly truthful—utterly candid.

"So now I'm a grass widower," he said. "I expect there will have to be a divorce—for Evelyn's sake. I rather dread it."

She said "yes" again and was thoughtful.

They sat there silently for a little while. A thrush was singing in a bush near by. The shadows lengthened on the croquet lawn. Jaffrey, with his long cigarette holder between his lips, was watering some of the flowers—an actor even in his garden, as he lifted up the head of a rose and said, "Lovely creature!"

Mallard felt sentimental, foolishly tempted to say rash things. He said them in his own mind. He said: "Now that Evelyn has gone I'm a lonely man—and free in a way. Most men would think themselves free. I'm still young enough to love. I would give everything in the world—even success—to have this girl's love, her beauty, her grace, her dear soul. If I let myself go by a hair's breadth I should make a romantic ass of myself. She lets me kiss her hand sometimes, but I want to kiss her lips, and to put my arms about her and feel the warmth and loveliness of her young body. She hides her eyes from me sometimes, but I want to look into them and see their loyalty and tenderness. I believe I could make her love me. I'm not old or withered.

I'm in the prime of life, a young man almost, young enough for years of happiness except for this broken-down heart of mine. We could be happy together, Rose and I. We laugh at the same things. We love life and beauty—flowers and little beasts, and trees. I wouldn't ask her to give up the stage. Every night I would go to the theatre and watch her act. Afterwards supper at the Carlton and no scandal-mongers to whisper at us. Then home together. A real home, with comradeship and love. All that I've missed. We'd come down here for holidays, and walk hand in hand in the woods and sit watching the changes of light across the lawns, and talk about art and music and all good things. We might have children. . . ."

"How plump that old thrush is!" said Rose. "Look at its little eyes, and the perky way it cocks its head at us."

"Yes," said Mallard. "Comical little beggar! Like a barrister I know—old Merrivale—with his hands tucked under his coat tails and the pomposity of Mr. Pickwick."

In his mind he continued sentimental monologue, until suddenly it was checked by gloomy thoughts. "I should be a cad if I made love to a girl like this—so young and fresh—with this rotten heart of mine. It wouldn't be fair. I might drop down dead at the altar rails. She might wake up one morning and find a corpse in her arms. I'll play the game to the end. I'm a damned egoist, but not such a cad as that. Not such a dirty cad as that."

"You're silent this evening," said Rose. She glanced at him curiously, wondering at this unaccustomed silence and then startled perhaps by some agony in his eyes, which he turned away from her. Were there tears in his eyes? Oh, surely not!

"It's beautiful here, in this garden," he said. "What do you call those flowers with the little blue bonnets?"

"Columbines," she told him, and glanced at him again anxiously. Yes, there was a little moisture in the eyes of her dear egoist.

"My dear!" she said. "What has happened? Tell me."

Her hand crept to his sleeve with an offer of comradeship.

"There's nothing to tell," he said. "I'm a little hipped, that's all. Evelyn—and loneliness! Do you think your father would like a game of croquet? I'm rather good at it!"

He played a great game and laughed at Jaffrey's dramatic postures with his mallet, his theatrical despair when he wired his ball, his tragic cry—hand to heart—when Mallard hit the stick and won by a long straight stroke.

VII

Rupert Boyd, that professor of psychology, spent most of his days writing a book on the mechanism of mind. But he found time for long walks with Mallard over the heathery commons, and he would rise before breakfast and dress, at least as far as dressing-gown and slippers, to prowl in the fruit garden for a feast of black currants and raspberries which more than once gave him a severe stomach ache—"though worth it," as he remarked with Christian resignation and a bottle of aspirin. He kept his evenings free of toil, and they were pleasant evenings when Rose came round with her father and played Chopin, mostly, or sang to them or listened—very patiently while her father told anecdotes of stage life which she had heard many times before, or with laughter in her eyes while Mallard capped the anecdotes with stories of the Bench and Bar. Then bridge sometimes until after midnight, with a wood fire burning in the grate—an English summer is seldom too hot for that—and the blinds undrawn by Mallard's orders so that they could look into the moonlit garden from which the scent of flowers came through the open windows.

Always after one of those evenings Mallard and Boyd walked back with their guests to that old house at the bottom of the lane—Boyd ahead with Rose's father who held on to his arm and called him "dear boy," and Mallard lingering behind a little with Rose, whose hand lay lightly on his sleeve, not knowing how he thrilled to her touch.

Pleasant days and pleasant evenings—though sometimes Mallard's nights were tortured by self-pity, by a revolt against the thing that threatened him.

"It can't be true!" he thought, a thousand times.

"I'm as fit as ever I was. Those doctors are fools. This heart of mine is as sound as a bell. . . . I'm damned if I'll die! I want to live. I've never known a day's ill-health until my heart gave a kick that night. Death. . . . Annihilation. . . . Never to see Rose again. To miss all the success for which I've struggled and fought —the reward of life. Oh, God! Oh, God!"

His nerves went wrong on one of those sleepless nights. He left his own room and went round to Boyd's bedroom and rapped at the door.

"Boyd! Boyd!" he called in a harsh whisper.

He opened the door, and found it unlocked, and turned up the light. Boyd lay asleep with one arm across his pillow. His hair was scarlet against its whiteness.

"Boyd!" said Mallard. "Wake up, for God's sake!"

Boyd sat up quite suddenly, blinking.

"Who's there?" he asked in a startled way. "What is it?"

"Boyd," said Mallard, "I feel hideously unwell. . . . I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what, old man?" asked Boyd. "Been seeing ghosts or something?"

"I'm afraid of myself," said Mallard. "I'm a damned coward, Boyd. I've got the jim-jams."

"My dear old man!" said Boyd with real concern. "Sit down and have a yarn. I've finished my beauty sleep."

He lit a cigarette and put on his horn-rimmed glasses which he had placed on the table by his bedside, and looked so ridiculous like that, with his red tousled hair, that Mallard's sense of humour got the better of his nerves.

"Boyd, you funny old devil! You're enough to make a cat laugh."

"I've often done it," said Boyd. "There was a cat up at Oxford, in the old days, who used to laugh every time I came into my rooms. I used to chuck things at it just to get that sarcastic smile out of its yellow, round eyes."

He was "rotting" for Mallard's sake. Not a bad fellow, Boyd, though eccentric and argumentative.

"Look here," said Mallard more calmly, "what's the good of science if it can't tell us if there's a survival after death? What's the good of all that muck you're writing if it can't answer a simple question like that? The mechanism of mind. Bosh! I want to know if there's any evidence about what happens—afterwards."

Boyd hesitated for a moment. On the subject of science he was utterly truthful. Blasphemy to him meant insincerity about the facts of science.

"No exact evidence," he answered. "Only vague surmises based on remote possibilities. One comes up against mysteries which evade chemical or physiological tests—every kind of analysis. We don't know what lies out in that No Man's Land, or beyond. We can only say—I think we can get as far as that—that there seems to be intelligence at work in what we call matter, and the human mind itself seems to have certain unexplained and possibly inexplicable faculties not limited by the physical mechanism of the brain; and perhaps—though that's going a bit far—not limited by time and space.

"I mean there's a certain amount of evidence—not quite satisfying—for thought transference between people at a distance and even for clairvoyance of things past and future. That suggests in a way that the mind is not dependent on its bodily functions—that mind exists independently of matter, and that the individual mind may tap, as it were, some universal stream of intelligence which is outside time and space. Of course, if we prove that scientifically—and it's by no means proved—it would not be difficult to believe in the existence of the soul and its survival in some form; a spiritual continuance would be highly probable, assuming all that!"

Mallard laughed ironically, almost harshly.

"It's too damn' vague," he said. "That sort of scientific faith based on 'probably' and 'possibly' is not likely to stop a man from indulging in the viler kind of vices, and doesn't give much comfort to stricken souls in search of courage—or hope."

Boyd grinned through his horners and thrust his fingers through his hair.

"I'm sorry I can't do better for you in terms of science. Of course, religion is another thing altogether—outside my department, old man. To the unscientific mind in search of comfort I should say join the Society of Friends, or the Primitive Baptists, or walk round to the nearest Catholic priest and go under instruction, or send a line to General Booth. Science has nothing to do with faith. Just as a knowledge of philology—the history and structure of language—has nothing to do with poetry."

He glanced at Mallard and noticed his pallor, his moody eyes, his dejection. That smiling ironist! That humorous egoist!

"If I were you," he said, "I'd have a talk with Billy Neal and get him to put you in touch with one of his intellectual Papists. They'd help you more than I can. They've plausible reasons for the whole box of tricks. A to Z. Charming fellows, too, in spite of all the prejudice against them."

Mallard did not seem to hear him. He sat there in his pyjamas, tilted back in his chair against the bedroom wall.

"Look here," he said presently. "I went to that medium again the other day. Do you remember that fellow Jago and his white-faced girl, at Brixton? They put me in touch with Ivo—unless they were faking. He keeps asking for me, they say. Certainly the voice which came through a luminous trumpet said some uncanny things."

He told Boyd the story of his experience and the reference to Rose Jaffrey which had startled him so much.

It startled Boyd.

"Remarkable!" he said. "I don't pretend to offer an explanation. I'd like to find out."

"That's just it," said Mallard. "You say science doesn't know what lies out in No Man's Land. Why don't you self-conceited scientists go out there and report back? Is there any truth, or isn't there, in these phenomena of spiritualism? It seems to me a short cut to certainty. Get in to touch with one spirit and we must believe in survival. One word with Ivo on the other side and I don't care a damn about death. One

glimpse of immortality and God becomes real and this brief little life of ours just an hour in a wayside inn on the way—home."

Boyd was stirred by the emotion with which Mallard spoke. He was impressed by his argument. It expressed thoughts which had been urgent lately in his own brain. He flung back the bedclothes and sat on the edge of the bed with his bare feel dangling.

"I'm inclined to agree," he said. "Science—especially my department of it—can't afford to ignore those things. Of course, I have my theories. I've read up a lot of this stuff, still I've never made my own experiments. If I could get hold of a good medium I'd have a go at it—test some of these supernormal faculties."

Mallard was silent. He seemed to be thinking out a new idea.

"Why not get that fellow Jago down?" he asked presently. "Why not make it worth his while? He and his sister. I could put them up in the gardener's cottage or somewhere. I want to find out if it's Ivo speaking. Your scientific tests ought to settle the question one way or the other."

Boyd's eyes glinted with a sudden amusement. The idea seemed to appeal to him.

"Not a bad notion," he said. "It might be a great lark. I mean it might be extremely interesting."

They sat up all that night forgetful of sleep. Boyd did most of the talking, deliberately, to keep Mallard's mind from brooding, and to steady his nerves. He told Mallard all he knew about the working of the mind and the hidden senses which science was discovering or rediscovering.

He agreed with Dr. William Brown, the English psychologist, that we could not set any fixed limit to the power of the mind over the body. Faith-healing was not only probable but certain. Why, in Switzerland girls made a joke of giving themselves warts and passing them on to their friends by suggestion! Baudoin proved that all sorts of disease—organic as well as nervous—could be cured in the same way, by intense suggestion either from within or from without. Nothing miraculous about it in the sense of supernatural, and

yet miraculous as a revelation of prodigious powers in the human mind.

"It's doubtful," said Boyd, "whether we can draw a line between natural and supernatural, just as there's no line between the subconscious and the conscious mind."

He talked for something like an hour about that subconscious mind. Goodness knows, he said, what happens in that storehouse of memories, impressions, and hidden knowledge. Sometimes he was tempted to believe that it was in touch with the Absolute, that is to say with a Universal Intelligence. Undoubtedly we all had hidden senses, undeveloped in most people, or perhaps dim vestiges of powers once known and used by remote ancestors. Under hypnotism, for instance, patients were aware of things which did not enter into their waking consciousness. Their minds seemed to be able to reach out beyond their surroundings and get knowledge in some incomprehensible way.

Even in a limited way there were some rather marvellous faculties of the mind. Take, for instance, thought-reading. A good deal of it undoubtedly was really muscle-reading. Those fellows who had their eyes bandaged and found things willed by the audience—what they were really doing was interpreting very delicately the almost imperceptible vibrations of the person holding them, or the faint differences of breathing in the audience, which directed them inevitably to a certain place and object. There was nothing fraudulent about it, and nothing supernatural, but all the same it was a revelation of the extremely sensitive and delicate instrument which we call the mind.

"Take those fellows who used 'divining' rods to find water or minerals," said Boyd. "Witch-doctors they were called in the old days. Now we know that they are acutely sensitive to very faint vibrations."

Even thought, he said, might be a physical vibration. The German scientist, Ostwald, maintained that many mental phenomena were due to the transformation of energy—stored up in the atoms and electrons, cells and tissues, and chemical processes of the human body—into nervous energy and psychic energy.

"The old bird," said Boyd, "asserts that an idea is simply a form of energy and nothing more or less, for nothing exists except—energy. All that spook stuff—table-turning and table-rapping, for instance—is simply effects of nervous and mental energy emanating from ordinary human brains. That's his theory. Of course it's not proved."

"What do you mean by 'psychic energy'?" asked Mallard. "It conveys nothing to me."

Boyd laughed and admitted that Mallard had put his finger on the weak spot.

"It means something beyond normal intelligence. Something to do with soul rather than mind. An unscientific term, because if we grant that we grant everything. All the same, it's useful for phenomena we can't explain. Cryptesthesia, for instance."

"Precisely!" said Mallard, smiling a little. "But what in heaven's name does that mean?"

"Hidden sensibility," said Boyd. "The great authority on that subject is Eugene Osty. You ought to read his *Supernormal Faculties*. Vastly interesting. He gives any number of experiments, taken under rigid tests, of hypnotized subjects who can call up pictures of the distant past or look into the future or tell what is happening to someone far distant, just by touching some object related with a particular scene or person. Mind you, I don't take his word for these things! He may have been duped. Still I do think that science is getting certain clues or hints of something beyond our present range of psychological knowledge."

"What about God?" asked Mallard. "Do these things lead to God or to devils?"

Boyd grinned through his big round glasses.

"You want to go so far, old man! Science moves cautiously. One step at a time. Still, it may comfort you to know that fellows like young Haldane—a bit of a humorist—are almost prepared to admit the possibility of God."

"Nice of them!" said Mallard, with a touch of his old irony.

"Then there's young Huxley," said Boyd. "He has departed from the tradition of his old grandfather who

shook the foundations of Victorian faith. Julian doesn't deny a spiritual interpretation of life. He sees a conscious intelligence working through evolution. He even hints at a vague belief—on scientific evidence, of course—in the phenomena of spiritualism. All very interesting, don't you think? All in advance beyond and away from the materialism of older scientists. I keep an open mind. Some unkind people would call it an empty mind."

The light of dawn came through Boyd's bedroom window during this strange conversation which had absorbed them so that time was forgotten. Outside in the gardens came a twitter of birds. There was a faint rosy flush in the square of sky above the muslin curtain.

Mallard rose at last with a tired laugh.

"Daybreak!" he said. "Jolly good of you, Boyd, to let me spoil your sleep like this. Reminds me of Oxford days when we used to jaw all night sometimes—about life and love. Mostly about love."

He laughed again, forgetting the "jim-jams" that had brought him to this room in the darkness.

"Lord, yes!" said Boyd. "That tobacconist girl in the High Street—how I loved that snub-nosed hussy!"

Mallard said something about a hot bath and then went to the window and looked out into the garden.

"Another day!" he said. "Beauty calling. Life waking up in the garden—and the smell of flowers."

He turned round to Boyd and spoke gravely.

"There must be a God somewhere, Boyd. You and I and all our little infidels are just putting our heads in bags and shutting out the light. I wish to goodness I hadn't chucked religion when I was a conceited young jackanapes and developing my ego. I'm all for simple faith! I envy young Billy. This world is going to hell and damnation unless we get back to belief in God. There's no meaning anywhere without that. That scientific stuff of yours doesn't seem to help—though I admit you held me spellbound."

Boyd yawned.

"Perhaps you're right, old man. It's all very difficult . . . and I was born sceptical. A cup of tea would do me a lot of good."

VIII

Boyd and Mallard had supper one night with John Jaffrey and his daughter in the old house at the bottom of the lane. The white-panelled room looked charming by candle-light, and Boyd thought with unaccustomed humility that he was the only one of the company who spoiled the picture. Rose had put on one of her stage frocks which she had worn in *The Beaux' Stratagem*, with a puffed petticoat of flowered silk, and looked like a portrait by Reynolds, exquisite and alluring. There was a touch of the Eighteenth Century too about Mallard's face and figure as he sat in a Chippendale chair with the candle-light softening his sharply cut profile. John Jaffrey in a shabby old dinner-jacket and big black bow over his crumpled shirt-front might have been posing for a portrait of Topham Beauclerk, the friend of Johnson.

"Queer thing!" thought Boyd. "These people adapt themselves to their environment. Or perhaps the atmosphere of this old house makes them revert to the spirit of their ancestors. I'm the only incongruous note in this room. This hair of mine and my ugly mug don't belong to the Reynolds' period. They're King's College, 1927."

Rose had been showing Mallard round the house—the little powder closet out of the best bedroom, the low-ceilinged rooms upstairs, the dining-room, with its dark oak panelling and polished floor worn by the feet of many generations, especially where they had sat at table. One of the rooms was haunted, she said. An old lady in Elizabethan dress was supposed to pass through the room sometimes, when the moonlight came through the casement windows, and pass into the powder closet leaving the door wide open.

They were talking about this when they came back into the room downstairs.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" asked Mallard.

"Not very much," said Rose, smiling at this question.

John Jaffrey overheard his daughter's disbelief and cried out against it in his theatrical way.

"Not believe in ghosts! Tut, tut! What about the ghost of Hamlet's father, and Banquo's ghost, and all the others? My dear Rose, child of my heart, we live amidst a crowd of ghosts, unseen but very near to us. This old house is thronged with them, all those dear women who once dwelt here and whose fragrance clings to these old walls, all those quiet, gracious souls who lived and laughed and wept and died under these old ceilings. I, for one, am aware of their presence. When I sit at dinner I raise my glass to them. When I open a door I bow to them and say, 'Allow me!' When I take a chair I always hope I am not disturbing anyone. 'Forgive a short-sighted stranger, madam'!"

He took a chair then and made an exaggerated bow to a gracious invisibility.

"Father—what an actor you are!" laughed Rose. "You pretend you've retired from the stage. You never will, dear Daddy!"

"What's your opinion, Boyd?" asked Mallard, glancing toward his friend in a quizzing way.

Mallard explained to the company that Professor Boyd had scientific theories about such things—about almost everything.

Boyd did not deny the possibility of ghosts but he did not believe they had supernatural existence. It was probably something to do with vibrations, he said. Just as a gramophone recorded sounds and reproduced them when the impressions on the wax record set up a new vibration, so it was possible that the vibrations set up ages ago by human personalities might be stored up and become visible or audible to very sensitive minds in tune, as it were, with those wave-lengths.

"These scientists!" exclaimed John Jaffrey. "They invent the most far-fetched theories to explain away the spiritual interpretation of life. My dear boy, permit an old actor to say in the immortal words of William Shakespeare:

> "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

"Very true, sir," said Boyd, "and I think I've heard those words before somewhere!"

"Ponder over them," said John Jaffrey, not annoyed by this sarcasm. "Think of them, Sir Scientist, with humility and reverence. . . . And now for a little game of bridge."

It was after the game of bridge when Mr. Jaffrey had gone down an awful bump by calling Four No-trumps —doubled by Mallard who was partner to Rose—that Boyd suggested a game of a different kind.

"Let's look into this question of vibrations," he said, leaning back in his chair and gazing at the company through his horn-rimmed glasses. "What about a little table-turning, in a scientific way?"

"That would be rather amusing!" said Rose. "I've never seen it done, and I can't believe it's true."

Mallard thought it was all rubbish. "People just push," he said. "Some of the Balliol men used to do it at Oxford, as a lark."

Rose's father thought there was something in it. One of his friends—a fellow-actor—had won three hundred pounds at Ascot by getting a tip from table-tapping.

"Good egg!" exclaimed Boyd. "We might get a tip like that for Goodwood."

He laughed in his shrill high voice, and then became serious and said that he proposed to a give a scientific demonstration.

They sat round a little Sheraton table. Boyd explained that they had to touch the table lightly with the tips of their fingers and that all their hands must be touching to form a chain of energy.

"Chain of humbug!" said Mallard, refusing to take it seriously.

But he liked the game because he sat opposite Rose and touched her hand. She looked into his eyes with a comical incredulity when presently the table gave some ominous creaks, and then a slight but distinct rock.

"Somebody's cheating!" she said, with accusing eyes.

"Not me," said Mallard.

"Nor I," said Rose's father, who was taking it all very seriously.

"It's beginning to work," said Boyd.

Mallard could feel a tingling at the tips of his fingers, and he was aware of a perceptible vibration in the table. Then quite suddenly, after five minutes or so, one leg rose several inches off the floor and the table was tilted toward him from the direction of Boyd.

"You darned old humbug!" laughed Mallard. "You're pushing it, Boyd."

"I swear I'm not," said Boyd. "I regard this as a scientific experiment. I never play about with science."

The table was leaning over at an angle of thirty degrees.

Rose Jaffrey's eyes sparkled.

"Oh, Mr. Boyd! I saw you pushing it."

"No," said Boyd. "On my word of honour—if that's any good."

He was quite surprised, quite honestly, at the steady way in which the table was moving away from him. They had to shift their chairs to give it free play until suddenly it crashed on the floor.

Rose gave a little laughing scream.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Mallard.

Rose's father looked grave and rather alarmed.

"It's devilish," he said. "Devilish!"

"Let's have another go," suggested Boyd. "It's rather interesting."

They put the table on its legs again and touched it with the tips of their fingers and made their chain of hands. Mallard's little finger was touching Rose's little finger. He thought how beautiful her hands were, how sensitive and delicately modelled.

The table creaked again.

"Full of life!" said Boyd.

It rose on one leg again—this time on Mallard's side.

"Who is cheating now?" asked Rose, and smiled into his eyes.

"No!" said Mallard. "I'm hardly touching the blessed thing."

The table moved several inches along the polished boards, so that they had to shift their chairs again to follow it. Then suddenly it began to rock first one way then the other until its rhythm was quite strong and almost violent.

"Good heavens!" cried Rose. She was laughing but there was just a hint of alarm in her eyes.

"Incredible!" said Mallard. "Boyd, I believe you're faking."

"Certainly not," protested Boyd.

They had to stand up, still keeping their fingers on the table and following it across the floor as it travelled at a quick pace with that rocking movement.

"My sainted aunt!" exclaimed Mr. Jaffrey. "It's possessed, beyond doubt. Some Puck-like jester from the other world!"

Suddenly the table came to a dead stand, lifeless and motionless, and this cessation of movement was as startling as its previous activity.

"Well!" said Rose. She looked at Mallard and raised her eyebrows with a comical expression of dismay. "I don't quite like it," she confessed. "It's frightening."

Boyd adjusted his horn-rimmed glasses.

"Very interesting," he answered. "I'm bound to say I had no notion it worked as strongly as all that."

"What worked?" asked Mallard. He was beginning to get interested. There was something uncanny about these things. It might be a clue to great mysteries.

"Our vibrations," said Boyd. "Some sort of electrical energy passing through us and communicated to the table. That and a very strong auto-suggestion. We really *are* pushing, unconsciously. I tested it. When that table stopped it was I who stopped it by thinking it would stop. It did stop! Why? Because my mind was no longer playing up to the rhythmic energy which we had unconsciously exerted."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Jaffrey impatiently, "I utterly decline to believe your explanation. I was not exerting any energy. The thing moved of its own free will. Or, rather, it was moved by some invisible being, some hobgoblin playing jokes with us."

"Sheer auto-suggestion and physical energy," said Boyd, calmly. "I'll show you something else if Miss Rose will lend me a pencil and a piece of paper. Also a wine glass, which I promise not to break."

For five minutes he was busy with those things. Then he produced the alphabet—each letter cut out—and

arranged them in a circle on the table with a wine glass in the centre.

"Miss Rose and Mallard will do this experiment," he said. "I fancy the lady is very susceptible to suggestion, like all artistic people, and Mallard here is charged with emotion, as a criminal lawyer ought to be."

He stood over them with a grin on his face and directed them to touch the wine glass with the tips of their fingers.

"Now," he said. "I will ask some questions and presently that glass will begin to spell out words, and answer them. A little patience, that's all!"

"What are you going to ask?" inquired Rose, raising her forefinger with a warning. "Nothing indiscreet, I hope."

Boyd thought deeply with a pucker between his eyebrows.

"Are there any ghosts in this house?" he asked.

The fingers of Mallard and Rose touched on the upturned wine glass.

For several minutes the glass did not move, and once or twice Rose Jaffrey smiled into Mallard's eyes as though to say, "Nothing doing, my friend!"

Then suddenly it slipped across the table and stopped at a letter.

"Y——" said Mr. Jaffrey in a sepulchral voice.

The glass slipped across the table again.

"E——" said Mallard quietly.

"T," said Rose Jaffrey with a laugh, and then corrected herself as the glass moved half an inch to the right. "No! . . . S. Y-E-S. Yes. . . . How extraordinary!"

Mallard was puzzled.

"It couldn't have been trickery, or even subconsciousness, on my part. I didn't even know where the letters were. Certainly not that S. As a matter of fact, I thought it was on this side of the table. How do you explain that, Boyd?"

Boyd thought it best to avoid explanations at that stage.

"Let's get on with the experiment," he said. "I'll ask another question."

Mr. Jaffrey suggested one.

"Ask whether it is an ancient ghost haunting this old house."

"That'll do," said Boyd.

The glass began to move again under the fingers of Mallard and Rose. It touched various unlikely letters —Q's and X's and Z's.

"Gibberish this time," remarked Rose.

Her father made one of his inevitable allusions from the immortal bard.

"You may call up spirits from the vasty deep—but will they come?"

"Wait a moment," said Mallard. "It seems to be spelling out something now."

Boyd peered at the letters to which the glass moved backward and forward across the table.

"O-L-D-L-D-Y. What on earth does that spell? O-L-D-L-D-Y."

"Old Lady," said Rose, "with the 'a' left out. Oh, surely!" She was rather excited by this discovery.

"Good heavens, yes!" said Mallard. "That old lady you told me about. The little old lady who passes through the best room into the powder closet!"

He laughed with a note of nervousness. He, too, was getting rather excited by these messages.

"Well, that sounds plausible!" admitted Boyd.

Rose Jaffrey glanced at Mallard.

"I'm not sure that I like it," she said in a low voice. "What do you think, Adrian?"

"It's amazingly interesting," he answered. "Let's go on a bit and see what happens."

His hand trembled slightly as he replaced the tips of his fingers on the wine glass.

"There's nothing spooky about it," said Boyd. "I'll explain it all later. You needn't get scared, you gullible souls!"

He asked another question.

"Why do you come back to this house? What is it that attracts you?"

The answer was very rapid this time.

"Life. . . . Love. . . ."

Boyd noticed that Mallard's face flushed slightly. He and Rose looked into each other's eyes.

"Life and love," said Mallard, in a low voice. "They would pull any spirit back to earth—if spirits come back."

Mr. Jaffrey lit another cigarette from the end of one which was still burning between his fingers. His eyes under their beetling brows had excitement in them. He moved around the table and let one of his hands rest on his daughter's shoulder.

"Strange! . . . Strange!" he exclaimed, in the voice of Hamlet when he sees his father's ghost.

"Have you any message for one of us here?" asked Boyd, addressing the table very politely.

"Isn't that going rather far?" asked Mallard. "It's like asking for a tip from eternity."

He spoke flippantly, with a smile about his thin lips, but his eyes had a serious look.

"Well then," said Boyd, "put it in a different way. Ask if the old lady is interested in anyone here."

For a few moments nothing happened. The glass seemed lifeless. Then it began to creep across the table to the letter M.

Rose looked at Mallard.

The next letter was A.

The third was L.

Then the glass repeated L and finished with 'A-R-T——"

"Close enough!" said Mallard. "The old lady is interested in me, I think. . . . I wonder why!"

He spoke jestingly again but he was deeply interested.

"It's natural," said Mr. Jaffrey, waving his hand toward Mallard. A distinguished visitor to this ancient house——"

He did not finish his sentence but went to the sideboard and poured himself out a glass of whisky and then came back to the table with the glass in his hand.

"What do you have to say to Mallard?" asked Boyd. "See what the old lady says to that."

"She refuses to answer," said Rose Jaffrey as the wine glass remained quiet under her finger-tips. "A very discreet old lady!"

"It's moving again," said her father.

It moved first this way and then that among those haphazard letters, picking them out daintily.

"It's a sentence this time," said Rose, "and rather charming.

"Love has no death and spirits meet across the bridge."

For a moment there was silence after Rose Jaffrey had read out those words.

"Beautiful words," said Mr. Jaffrey reverentially. "Words of good hope, dear friends."

Rose was the first to see that Mallard was very much moved by them. He rose unsteadily from the table and stood holding on to the back of his chair.

"Boyd," he said rather sharply, "what does all this mean? Those strange words—this moving glass—that message to me. What explanation is there, if it is not supernatural?"

Boyd laughed in that shrill pitch which was rather irritating sometimes.

"The explanation is perfectly simple," he said. "You and Miss Jaffrey were just spelling out those words—picking out the letters—answering your own subconscious questions. I fancy it was you, old man, who dictated the words. Miss Jaffrey just responded to your vibrations."

"My mind was a blank," said Rose. "I mean I did not influence the glass in any direction. I am quite certain of that, Mr. Boyd."

"Quite!" agreed Boyd amiably. "Neither of you was cheating. You were both unconscious that your finger-tips were responding to your thought. Mallard's thought, in my judgment. You see how easy it is for simple souls to be deceived by all that occult stuff. Here is a group of highly educated, extremely intelligent, perfectly honest people—I leave myself out—thoroughly convinced that a message has come through from the spirit world. How can you blame the ignorant, credulous, superstitious crowd who get gulled by this sort of thing? I am not an absolute disbeliever in supernormal faculties, but as far as this goes—I assure you—it was just the working of subconscious intelligence through your very sensitive finger-tips. Not a doubt of it."

They were all unconvinced by his explanation.

"No!" said Mallard. "That message answered a question in my mind—I admit that—but I was utterly startled by the answer. It didn't come out of my mind, Boyd."

"Nor out of what I am pleased to call my mind," said Rose. "I don't have such beautiful thoughts!"

She repeated, in her sweet musical voice that had thrilled many full houses, the words that had been spelled out by the moving glass.

"Love has no death and spirits meet across the bridge."

Mallard looked across to her with a wistful smile.

"Do you believe that?" he asked. "Do you believe the meaning of those words, Rose?"

A faint wave of colour crept into her face and her eyes looked away from him.

"Yes," she said. "I believe that love has no death if it is loyal and pure."

"We must believe that," said Mr. Jaffrey, very gravely and emotionally. "Otherwise God mocks at us. Rose's dear mother is waiting for me in her beauty. I am as sure of that as I am of my own existence."

"That may be an illusion," suggested Boyd quietly.

"Hark at that sceptic!" shouted Mr. Jaffrey with a laugh that was half angry. "Isn't he a terrible fellow? What merry tortures shall we devise for such a wretch?" He threatened Boyd with the poker.

On the way home down the dark lane Mallard was silent until they had passed the gipsies on the other side of the hedge, where a light glimmered in their tent and a baby wailed. Then he spoke quietly.

"How beautifully she spoke those words, Boyd! 'Love has no death and spirits meet across the bridge.' . . . Natural or supernatural, they thrilled me tremendously. I believe they're true."

"That's why the glass spelled them out," said Boyd. "You answered your own question, old man."

Mallard laughed good naturedly.

"You scientists ought to be killed," he said, but put his hand through his friend's arm with a comradely touch.

IX

YOUNG Neal came down a fortnight later and Mallard was glad to have him. He was sentimental about this boy for whom he had an elder brother's comradeship, or, when he reminded himself of his own age and that secret about his health, a father's love.

"You'll find it rather dull here," he said, "unless we ransack the neighbourhood for pretty girls and fellows of your own age."

But Billy, as they all called him, thought he could put in a month very pleasantly without artificial excitement. The tennis court looked in good shape and he had brought down his golf sticks and was inclined to do a bit of fishing now and then. As for pretty girls, he found them hopeless in the way of conversation—he could never think of what to talk about—and anyhow Miss Jaffrey, he said, provided all the beauty that was really necessary in a country place. Curiously enough, he found it easy to talk to *her*. But, of course, she was something more than a pretty girl. He thought her the most wonderful actress he had ever seen.

"I agree," said Mallard, and he was pleased by Billy's tribute to Rose which he repeated privately for her pleasure.

"It must be splendid to think that crowds of unknown people feel like that toward you. Your art and beauty make life richer for them."

"I do feel it's splendid," she answered, and did not deny her art or beauty but accepted these qualities as something outside herself, or rather as something that had been given to her and for which she felt very deeply responsible.

For Wilfred's sake Mallard invited some of the local

people to tea or dinner, and the lawns were crowded sometimes with Surrey folk who played tennis extraordinarily well and knew the names of all his flowers, and fell into raptures over his herbaceous borders or his standard roses, though he had nothing to do with them and could not claim any credit. He was careful to explain that his wife had gone for a cruise in the Mediterranean with some old friends and he was aware of a faintly perceptible curiosity on the part of some of his guests about Evelyn's whereabouts.

Some of the ladies too were inclined to be arch and smilingly suggestive regarding Rose. One of them—the wife of a retired general who had been "unstuck" in the great war—went rather far in her ridiculous innuendous so that he had to be rude to her.

"You have a very lovely neighbour now, Mr. Mallard! Only a field away, too. I suppose you see quite a lot of her?"

"Miss Jaffrey, you mean," he answered coldly. "Yes, I see as much of her as I can."

"You're such *great* friends, I hear," said the lady. "Your little suppers at the Carlton were mentioned in the newspapers and caused us quite a flutter down here."

That abominable paragraph! So it had found its way even into Surrey gardens.

"One has supper with one's friends," he said freezingly.

"She looks exquisite!" said this purveyor of tittle-tattle, and raised her lorgnette to look at Rose who was playing croquet with Boyd and Billy and some other girl. "Such a filmy frock, too! One can see her limbs through it. These young things of to-day don't bother about little things like that! And, of course, Miss Jaffrey is an actress, anyhow."

"If you don't like actresses——" said Mallard with a sudden flush of rage.

He controlled himself and broke off his sentence.

"There are some ices in the drawing-room," he said, and moved away from the woman across the lawn. "One of the worst types," he thought. "One of those women who tempt their husbands to buy weed-killer

and make mistakes, poor devils. I remember defending one of them and felt sorry for him."

Some of the neighbourhood called on Rose and her father, and Rose returned their calls, but it did not go much farther than that, although the retired generals and colonels and some of the subalterns from Aldershot who happened to be at home when she came were enthusiastic about her beauty. Some of them had seen her in *The Beaux' Stratagem* and other plays and were excited to behold her off the stage.

"A pretty creature, that Miss Jaffrey," said one of the old men to Mallard one afternoon when she was in his garden. "It's a pleasure to see her walk across the grass, and good to think that England still grows such lovely flowers. But I've no patience with this outcry against our young people. The girls are wonderful."

Mallard was not angry with that tribute from old age to this girl for whom he had a worshipful love. But it was obvious that the women were suspicious of his relations with her, either in a smiling, broad-minded way as though he could trust *them* not to be narrow or puritanical—Surrey, they seemed to say, was not so far from London as all that!—or in a furtive, frightened way as though scandal might break out at any moment and sully them. Well, he was indifferent to all that, as long as Rose did not know, or mind. He was going to make the best of this summer. He was not going to let public opinion or malicious minds interfere with this spiritual love which made life so precious to him. Spiritual love. He wanted to keep it that, though once or twice he was afraid of himself because passion touched him.

He was afraid one day when they walked in the woods together. There was a hot sun in the open fields, but here in the woods behind her house it was cool and shady with a lace-work pattern of sunlight and shadow on the sandy paths between the glades. Rose was in a summer frock, and she walked bareheaded with a glint of gold in her hair. She picked a nosegay of wild flowers and told him their names.

"Ragged Robin." "Speedwell." "Lords and Ladies." The dear old names.

Presently she began to sing, and then laughed when a tit, or some small bird, followed her from bush to bush, cheeping happily and watching her with his little beady eye.

"Why not sit down?" she asked. "This bank is quite dry, and it's fairyland here. This is the Forest of Arden, and I feel like Rosalind under the greenwood tree."

"And I am the melancholy Jaques," said Mallard.

Rose Jaffrey sang again, smiling up at him.

"Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me,
And tune his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither!"

There was an invitation in her eyes to sit beside her, and she touched the grass and said, "Come hither, melancholy Jaques . . . You're so restless, always!"

"Not with you, my dear," he said.

It was then that he was afraid. She looked so slim and lovely there. She was Rosalind in the spirit of youth and the love that he craved—the love that he had missed most of his life. How sweet it would be to lie with her, his arms around her, her dear head on his breast, her heart against his. Life meant that. Without that, life was empty. In a little while perhaps he would be gone. There was still time for love, and a moment or two of ecstasy, and an eternal pledge. "Love has no death and spirits meet across the bridge." He would go on first and wait for her. This English rose would come across the bridge to him in her beauty.

He felt a tremor pass through his body and brain. Youth stirred in him. The law had not withered him. He was still young and vital and sensitive. Why should he deny himself the loveliness of life? . . .

"Rose!" he said, and then, as he spoke her name, some little bell rang in his brain.

Very clearly he could hear a voice inside himself mocking. "The Romantic Forties!"

He sat beside her with his hands clasped round his knees.

"Tell me about your new part," he said.

She was not interested then in her new part. She seemed shy of him after he had called out her name with a strange tremor in his voice. Once or twice she glanced at him with thoughtful and wistful eyes as he sat there beside her with his hands clasped round his knees like that. But he did not see the wistfulness.

That was the first time he was afraid of himself. And the second time was when he drove her in his car to some of the neighbouring churches which she wanted to see, because she loved their quaintness and history. It was in Compton Church that they spent the longest time that afternoon, looking at its Norman arches with their dog's-tooth pattern, and the two altars, one above the other—unusual and charming—and the crosses of the pilgrims scrawled on the pillars (the Pilgrim's Way had passed through this old village), and the leper's squint from which the altar could be seen without coming into the body of the church. There was an old board with a hole worn through it where people had leaned there on their elbows, hundreds of years ago. Not lepers, perhaps, but sick folk, or prisoners, or some unfortunates kept apart from the people of this parish, or merely lazy bones arriving late.

Rose wandered round with grave eyes and a faint smile about her lips and a look of reverence. She put her hand on Mallard's arm and whispered to him, or spoke in a low tone.

"How restful here! One feels the presence of dear ghosts."

"The dead past," said Mallard. "All the history of England from Norman times. I like to touch these old stones."

He touched them then, as though some spirit came out of them and passed into him.

"I think of the boys who went out to the war from this village," said Rose. "In the trenches their hearts must have gone back to this old church. It must have meant England to them."

"Ivo used to think of his school chapel," said Mallard. "He used to dream—in his dirty dug-out on the Somme—that he was back there again. Poor old Ivo!"

Rose sat down on one of the pews and Mallard stood beside her. He could see that she was looking up to one of the stained-glass windows through which rich colour streamed. She had a mystical look, he thought, and as he watched her a big tear touched her eyelashes and then fell down her cheek. She brushed it away, and a few moments later rose and crept out of the church. He followed her into the porch where she was reading some notice, and hearing his footsteps she turned and smiled at him, and he saw that her eyes were still wet and shining.

"Why did you cry?" he asked tenderly, and touched one of her hands for a moment.

"Life is so sad—and beautiful," she answered. "This little church—how nice to believe, like simple souls!"

"Don't you believe?" he asked.

She shook her head and smiled again.

"Only vaguely. Who does nowadays? Not in Chelsea or schools of acting. Not among the clever little intellectuals who write plays and novels, or act them, or talk about life and art. . . . I was brought up in that atmosphere. One misses something. One knows—nothing!"

"No," he said, "nothing. That's the worst of it. Nothing about death—or what happens afterwards."

"One hopes," said Rose. "One believes, vaguely, in some eternal goodness. But one can't get back to simplicity, once having lost it."

Mallard looked at her intently and spoke gravely.

"The other night you said you believed that love has no death and that spirits meet across the bridge. Do you think—honestly, Rose—that you and I will meet like that—afterwards?"

She leaned a little toward him with her face raised to his, and a smile in her eyes, and her hand laid lightly on his sleeve.

"Honestly," she said. "Yes, my dear. I'll be waiting for you, somewhere, if I get there first."

She assumed that she would have to wait for him. And it was then, for the second time, that he felt afraid of himself. He was tempted, so frightfully tempted

then, to tell her—everything: about that rotten heart of his, about his love, about his fear of "snuffing out" into nothingness. She would understand. She would help him. Her love, if she would love him, would give him faith and courage. Then once again he heard that voice inside him mocking.

"The Romantic Forties!"

Standing there in the porch of that church how could he make honest love to this girl? He was still a married man though deserted perhaps by his wife. He wasn't sure yet. He was middle-aged and likely to drop dead at any moment. At least that was what those damn' doctors had told him. All his life he had been an egoist, thinking of himself first, demanding everything for his personality, puffed up with self-conceit, conscious of his own splendour. Yes, that was true enough, but he wouldn't sacrifice this girl on the altar of his egotism. He'd draw the line at that.

"Your father will be anxious about us," he suggested. "It's long past tea time."

She smiled at some secret thought.

"Perhaps we've been rather morbid!" she said. "Why think of death when the sun is shining? Look how bright it is beyond this dark old porch. . . . And I've strawberries and cream waiting to be eaten in a white-panelled room."

X

It was Boyd who kept Mallard up to the idea of getting those two mediums, Emery Jago and his girl, down into the country for experimental purposes. Mallard had weakened on the subject because of young Neal.

"Billy doesn't like that sort of thing," he said. "He regards it as next door to blasphemy."

Boyd pooh-poohed this objection.

"Billy can go and play chess with old Jaffrey if he disapproves of scientific experiments."

"Well, anyhow, they mayn't care to come," said Mallard.

But they did care to come. Emery Jago sent a very well-written letter accepting Mallard's invitation to spend a week in the gardener's cottage next door and to arrange a few séances in the evenings. He suggested three, and, in answer to Mallard's inquiry as to terms, proposed a fee of twenty guineas, including a few sittings with the crystal if his sister felt inclined.

"My sister," he added, "has been a little run down lately and country air will do her good. That is an additional reason for accepting an invitation which appeals to me personally, as I am much interested in the spirit of your brother Ivo who has again come through."

Mallard passed this letter over the breakfast table to Boyd one morning.

"That fellow is either sincere, or a most abominable charlatan," he remarked. "Which do you think, Boyd?"

"That's what we've got to find out," said Boyd.

It was not until two or three days later that Mallard mentioned the matter to young Neal. Somehow he felt rather ashamed, as though confessing to some mental weakness, and he was not surprised at the boy's protest.

"Oh, Lord! I wouldn't if I were you, sir. There's something beastly about it all."

"Yes," said Mallard. "I feel like that, too. And yet I can't help feeling interested. It's so vastly important after all, and Boyd is going to put it to the test scientifically. Supposing you heard spirit voices, Billy, would you refuse to believe—whatever the evidence of truth?"

"I don't hold with spooks," said young Neal impatiently. "In my opinion—not that I know anything about it, of course—they're probably devils playing hell with credulous minds."

"Then you don't deny the possibilities of spirit manifestations?" asked Mallard. "It's not against the faith of your Church?"

Wilfred Neal laughed.

"On the contrary, I should say! But I'm not an authority, sir. I know we were warned not to touch this sort of thing. That's good enough for me and anyhow I'm not interested. By the way, why are you off tennis these days?"

Mallard indulged in a little camouflage.

"I'm not so young as I was, Billy. Old age creeping on."

"Oh, rot, sir!" laughed young Neal. "You could run me round the common and leave me for dead. Let's have a singles."

"Well, not this morning. I'm rather busy with some law work. To-morrow, perhaps."

He ached to play a set of tennis again. He had a good mind to do so and take the risk. It was rather rubbish about his heart. He felt perfectly fit now. It was probably just a scare after a hard innings in the courts. Those doctors had made too much of a temporary breakdown—and cost him a lot of agony and weeks of morbid thought. He intended to consult another specialist.

It was Billy who drove down to the station to fetch Jago and his girl. That was decent of him after his frank dislike of "spook stuff" as he called it. They arrived at tea time when Rose and her father were there, having been previously warned about these strange visitors, much to their surprise.

Rose had expressed a mild uneasiness, looking at Mallard with a certain anxiety.

"Isn't it rather dangerous?" she asked. "I mean one might be drawn into rather unhealthy things."

Boyd fathered the idea, to relieve Mallard of any embarrassment.

"It's my notion, Miss Jaffrey. It's part of my job, in a way. A psychologist can't ignore this kind of thing."

Mr. Jaffrey thought they might have some very interesting evenings if Mallard allowed them to be present.

Then he smiled and waved his hand at Boyd.

"If any spirit passes that sceptic there will be no room for disbelief. Personally, I'm on the side of the angels, in spite of all my sins."

They were sitting at tea in Mallard's drawing-room which looked out on to the terrace through an open loggia above the little Dutch garden with a stone wall dovecote in the centre of the innumerable rose trees. Bees were busy in the catmint growing on the stone walls about the crazy pavement and made a low, deep chant. Presently there was the sound of a motor-car coming down the drive and making a sharp sweep to the front door.

"Here they are!" said Mallard, with a rather nervous laugh. "That queer couple!"

"We shall have to be kind to them," said Rose. "That white faced girl—I daresay she will feel shy at first. . . . And I shall certainly feel shy of that strange young man. There's something very odd about him."

"Don't forget his name," said Boyd. "Jago. Rather a queer name."

Mallard went into the hall to meet them. They could hear Billy's voice making himself polite.

"You'll like the garden. It's topping."

Then Mallard:

"I hope you had a good journey. Not too tired, eh?"

He brought them into the drawing-room just as Boyd had winked at Rose Jaffrey as though to say, "This is going to be rather amusing."

"Come in," said Mallard cheerily. "We're just having tea and I'm sure you'll want some. Let me introduce you."

Belle Chubb held on to Emery Jago's hand for a moment. She wore a plain black frock with a white collar hardly whiter than her face. She looked ill, with dark lines beneath her eyes, and only her lips were

smiling as Mallard introduced her to the company. She looked frightened.

Emery appeared to be perfectly at ease except for a faint flush of colour which crept into his usual pallor. He wore a suit of grey cloth, ready-made by the look of it, and brown boots which were new and just a touch too yellow. His hair was rather long, as usual, and Rose noticed again his small, delicate, womanish hands.

For a few moments while Belle was being introduced he stood motionless with a fixed smile and quick searching eyes which roved about the room taking in every detail, until they stared at Rose Jaffrey. She had her back to one of the windows so that her face was shadowed. Perhaps for that reason he had not seen her at first glance. Boyd, who was watching him, noticed that he gave a sudden and perceptible start when Mallard mentioned her name to the girl and his dark eyes seemed to become more luminous for a moment.

"Probably seen her at the theatre," thought Boyd. "She puts a spell on people when she's acting. A great gift that. Indefinable."

"You have met Miss Jaffrey before," Mallard was saying. "That night we all came on from the Carlton."

Emery Jago bowed gravely and was uncertain for a moment whether he ought to shake hands. Rose Jaffrey, in her kind way, put him at ease by holding out her hand and he held it for a moment longer than he ought to have done, as she afterward told Mallard in commenting on the delicacy of his hands. "Like a woman's," she said.

Belle was sitting on the window seat next to Rose, and young Neal brought her some strawberries and cream and a cup of tea which he placed on a small table by her side.

"Thanks most awfully!" she said, as though unaccustomed to be waited on like this by an elegant young man.

"Do you like the country?" asked Rose.

"I can't say I'm very familiar with it," answered Belle, choosing her words carefully. "It looks priceless, I must say."

She gave one quick timid look at the garden through

the open window and then made a little exclamation of delight.

"Oh, ain't those roses lovely!"

That remark which broke from her so naturally was followed by a painful blush, and she glanced timidly at Emery Jago who was looking at her with disapproval.

She corrected herself hurriedly

"I mean, aren't those roses nice! Don't you think so, Em?"

"Beautiful," he said quietly. "This is a hiding place of beauty. A world away from the Brixton Road!"

"Have some cake," suggested young Neal.

Conversation was somewhat difficult, owing to Belle's shyness and Emery Jago's gravity and self-consciousness. There was one painful moment when Belle upset her plate of strawberries by turning suddenly to answer a question from Rose. The cream made a pool on the polished boards.

"Do be careful, Belle!" exclaimed Emery rather sharply.

"Oh, Lor'!" she cried. "Sorry and all that."

She tried to cover up her confusion by a shrill, nervous laugh, and then stooped down to scoop up the mess with her teaspoon.

"Don't bother," said Mallard. "I'm always doing that!"

It was young Neal who came to the rescue gallantly and brought another plate of strawberries and cream.

"Ta!" said Belle, hiding her shyness under an air of extreme ease which couldn't deceive anyone.

"It's very restful down here," remarked Emery, diverting attention from Belle. "It's the quietude that's so strange to me. No trams or anything! Wonderfully still at night, I should imagine."

He addressed his remarks to Rose and she noticed that he looked at her furtively now and then. But she was used to that. Most men looked at her where she went. Beauty sometimes was a great nuisance.

"So still at night that you can hear a mouse creep," she answered.

"It might get on one's nerves," said Emery, and he smiled at her and showed his bad teeth for a moment.

After tea Mallard took them to the gardener's cottage next door and showed them their rooms upstairs. Their luggage had already been taken there and Mallard noticed that they had only brought two shabby bags. No bulky apparatus, anyhow, for raising spirits !

"I hope you will be quite comfortable here," he said. "The gardener and his wife will look after you. Mrs. Lymposs is a very good cook. If you like strawberries and raspberries the fruit garden will be glad to see you, though you will find Professor Boyd has picked the best, I'm afraid."

He tried to make them feel at ease and then spoke a friendly word to the girl, so white and shy.

"I should sit in the garden as much as possible, if I were you, Miss Jago. Try and get some colour in your cheeks, eh ?"

"Yes," said Emery, answering for her. "Ultra-violet rays—that's what she wants. We live too much in the dark at that little house in Brixton. It's no fun being a medium—in spite of the interest of the work."

Then he inquired about the time Mr. Mallard would like to arrange the first séance. They were quite ready to begin at once—that very evening if he liked. Of course, it might be a failure. He was not at all sure that anything would happen away from his usual environment. No doubt Mr. Mallard and Professor Boyd would understand the difficulties—the trickiness, as he might say—of getting into the right psychic state in a perfectly strange place.

"You ought to rest this evening," said Mallard. "That will give you time to get familiar with your surroundings. There's no hurry at all."

He left them there in the gardener's cottage after introducing them to Mrs. Lymposs who was going to look after them—a cheerful, chatty soul who would make them feel quite at home. As he left the room he saw the girl—Belle, as Jago called her—turn to the medium with a kind of frightened look, and Mallard wondered for a moment if Jago ill-treated her or played the bully. That fellow had a quiet, plausible way with him, but there was no knowing what his character was like in private life.

XI

The first séance in Mallard's house was arranged for nine o'clock the next evening, and before that time Emery and Belle came up from the cottage and were shown into the library, while Mallard and Professor Boyd and young Neal were lingering over coffee in the dining-room.

Boyd had met Emery and the girl in the fruit garden that morning and he had had a long talk with the man, sitting on a stone seat below the tennis court, while Belle had wandered round looking at the flowers.

"I'm bound to say I'm rather impressed," said Boyd. "That fellow Jago has read up his subject all right. He knows a good deal about psychology and all the literature of psychic stuff. He quotes Geley, and Richet, and Tischner, and Osty, and Ostwald, and others, regarding supernormal faculties and psychic energy. Rather extraordinary for a photographer in Brixton. Devilish plausible, too. Doesn't claim too much. Admits that he doesn't understand much about his own mysterious powers and suspects that some of these so-called phenomena are due to mental telepathy and the workings of the subconscious mind."

"What do you think of his honesty?" asked Mallard anxiously.

He suspected that Boyd was looking at this affair as a scientific lark. For him it was a matter of vital importance. It was not merely interesting to investigate these things as an intellectual amusement, as Boyd seemed to think. To him it was a question of life and death—eternal life or eternal death. That fellow Jago asserted that he was in touch with Ivo. If it were Ivo speaking nothing else mattered. Nothing on earth,

except his love for Rose. She had promised to wait for him across the bridge. He wanted to know there *was* a bridge. In this séance to-night they might speak across it to those who had already passed—hear Ivo's voice.

Boyd was non-committal about Jago's honesty.

"I'm going to watch him. That's what we've got him down for. I rather suspect he has prepared some sensational stuff for us. He got talking about 'apports' and spirit photographs. He has brought a camera with him, he says, in case there are any materializations. That's going a bit far!"

"What on earth are apports?" asked Mallard.

Boyd explained.

"Some of these mediums produce queer things which are conveyed—a*pporté*—from the spirit world, or at least by spiritual agency. Flowers, coins, prehistoric pottery, strange junk which was not in the neighbourhood before. I smelled a rat directly he got on to that idea. I'm prepared to believe a fair amount—if there's good evidence—but I can't believe that spirits convey material objects from their side to ours, or even from one place to another. It's senseless."

"Perhaps it's to prove their powers," suggested Mallard.

"Well, we'll see!" said Boyd, with an enigmatical smile.

Young Neal had been rather silent, and looked hipped by this conversation.

"In my opinion," he said quietly, "that fellow Jago is a morbid-looking swine. Why doesn't he get his hair cut?"

Mallard smiled and said, "Don't be snobbish, young fellow! Not everyone has been to Balliol, you know."

"I agree," said Wilfred. "But that's no reason why we should be polite to long-haired degenerates who sell themselves to the Devil."

He spoke hotly, and then seeing that Mallard looked hurt, apologized instantly.

"Sorry, sir! But honestly I don't approve of this sort of thing very much. I mean it's not English."

Boyd laughed heartily at that expression "not English."

"Oh, Stonyhurst! Oh, Oxford!" he said. "Because a thing's not English it's taboo. It's not English to discuss ideas of any kind. It's not English to inquire too closely into the mysteries of life. It's not English to learn anybody's language, or to depart by a hair's breadth from the public school accent or the latest thing in ties."

"I rather think you understand what I mean, sir," said Wilfred addressing Mallard and avoiding Boyd's ironical grin.

"Perfectly," said Mallard. "That was my code before I—well, widened my interests a little."

In his own mind he said, "before I looked death in the eyes for the first time."

Mallard's man, Sadler, came into the room and made an announcement.

"The young persons are in the library, sir."

Mallard waited a few minutes until Mr. Jaffrey and Rose came, and another few minutes while Mr. Jaffrey drank a glass of port and declaimed a line or two from some old play.

> "What though youth gave love and roses?
> Age still leaves us friends and wine."

He raised his glass to Mallard and Boyd with a noble gesture.

Rose was in a frock of wine-coloured silk cut low at the shoulders, and the candle-light on the polished table seemed to shine in her eyes.

"I feel excited," she said, "and rather wicked!"

"It's your goodness that will save us from evil spirits," said young Neal, smiling at her with a look of admiration.

"Oh, a pretty speech!" she cried, and looked at Mallard with laughing eyes.

"And true," said Mallard. "Billy took the words out of my mouth."

Then they went into the library where Emery and Belle were waiting for them.

Emery Jago wore a black velvet jacket over a lack

waistcoat and trousers and he wore a big black tie round his neck like a stock, so that he was all dark except for his pallid face and luminous eyes. Belle wore a black silk frock without a touch of colour and looked very slim and frail. No colour had crept into her cheeks yet from country air.

They were standing by the table when Mallard and his friends came in, and Emery was fixing up a tin trumpet in three parts which fitted into each other. He showed it to Boyd.

"You had better have a look at this thing. There's no trick about it."

He smiled as though he regarded Boyd as his antagonist and critic.

Boyd examined it and saw nothing wrong with it.

Then he made a suggestion.

"In case anything unusual happens—those apports, for instance—you don't object to my searching you a little? This is a scientific test, you know."

"Is that quite necessary?" asked Mallard, afraid of hurting the feelings of a man who, after all, was his guest.

"Quite necessary," said Boyd. "Personally, I suspect everybody in this sort of game. Even my own sense of evidence."

"Quite right," said Emery calmly. "I suppose you don't want me to strip? If so we had better go upstairs."

"Oh, we needn't go as far as that," said Boyd. "Just ordinary precautions."

He felt Emery's body, passing his hands over that velvet jacket and his black trousers.

"What's that in your pocket?" he asked sharply.

Emery Jago looked amused and pulled out of his pocket a small bottle of aspirin.

"That's for headaches," he explained. "Nothing tricky."

"Miss Jaffrey," said Boyd, "will you be good enough to search Miss Jago? Superficially, of course."

"If she will let me," said Rose rather shyly.

"Quite all right!" said Belle standing up straight.

Rose passed her hands over the girl's body.

"How thin you are!" she cried. "You ought to take plenty of cream, my dear."

Boyd accepted that as evidence that nothing was concealed in the girl's frock. Nothing bulky, anyhow.

But as a scientist, with a sense of responsibility, he was not satisfied until he had gone round the room shaking the curtains, looking into the vases, and giving a general scrutiny.

"If I were a spirit," said Mr. Jaffrey, "I'd resent all that impertinent curiosity, Sir Scientist!"

"As a matter of fact," said Emery, "it does spoil the contacts sometimes. Any hostile influence is not conducive to good results."

"Without scientific tests there are no good results," said Boyd, with a slight harshness of tone.

Emery arranged the chairs round the gateleg table in the centre of the room. They stood about three paces from the table on which the trumpet lay. Then he turned and spoke gravely with a touch of dignity and command.

"I don't object to Professor Boyd's suspicions but I must ask for quietude and reverence. There must be no moving or whispering. Nor can I allow any interruptions or hostile comments. I want you to sit on those chairs with your hands on your knees. The room, of course, will have to be in darkness."

"Why?" asked Boyd. "That seems to be very suspicious."

"Professor Boyd," said Emery grimly, "you know perfectly well, I think, that darkness is necessary in most cases for any supernormal phenomena. It is a psychological, as well as a psychic, law, merely because light distracts the attention and lets in exterior impressions. I am not going into a trance-like state exactly, but my mind has to be perfectly blank, and my nervous sensibilities must not be jarred by visibility which keeps one alert and conscious of one's environment. This is not only the result of experience but it is also common sense, as I think you will agree. I speak to you as a psychologist."

"Well," said Boyd grudgingly, "I don't deny that altogether. Still I regard it as a weakness from the point of view of evidence."

"The evidence is circumstantial," said Emery "as I

am sure Mr. Mallard will understand. If a spirit voice says things which are not within the knowledge of the medium—and which are properly verified—that is very good evidence of supernatural truth, it seems to me."

"I agree," said Mallard.

Emery turned to him and bowed slightly.

"In that case I will ask you to take your seats and for someone to turn out the lights. I shall sit here, if you don't mind, as it is farthest away from the table. My sister will sit on the other side of the room so that there can be no collusion between us. Sit down, Belle."

Rose Jaffrey was impressed by Emery's dignity and gravity. She noticed that his eyes were fastened on her and seemed to be looking at her hair. She had noticed that before. Her hair seemed to attract his attention for some reason. There was a kind of softness in his gaze and a little smile about his lips. He was certainly a very strange young man and rather frightening. There was something uncanny about him. "Fey," as Scotch people would say. She felt a cold, nervous shudder down her back when Boyd switched off the electric light, leaving them in almost complete darkness except for a very faint light which came through the drawn blinds but did not penetrate the room. She sat next to Mallard and could hear his quiet breathing. On the other side of her, a yard away and utterly quiet, was the girl with the white face.

It was perhaps ten minutes or more before anything happened. Then the trumpet on the table began to move. It was luminous round the rim and that circle of phosphorescence rose a yard, as it seemed, above the table and then dropped back, exactly as Mallard had seen it when alone in that room in Brixton. Distinctly they could hear its metallic touch on the polished board. Presently it scraped along the table slightly and rose again, jerkily at first, and then made a clean swoop high up and remained there, poised, but unsteadily.

Rose stretched out her hand and found Mallard's hand and clasped it. She felt frightened, and was glad to feel Mallard's human touch. He raised her hand to his lips there in the darkness.

Emery Jago's voice rapped out.

"Someone is moving. I must insist on perfect immobility."

Rose's hand slipped back to her lap.

Vague queer voices were coming out of the trumpet, very faint and indistinct. They sounded like several people speaking at once in different voices, all blurred. Then one voice, quite clearly, but as though a long way off, said, "Get off the line!" It was followed by a curious whirring sound and then by several words in French.

"*Non madame, je vous en prie.*"

After that there was absolute silence for several minutes until quite suddenly a voice rang out clearly through the trumpet.

"All right, Ivo. The juice is strong enough now."

Mallard drew a sharp breath and his chair creaked slightly.

There were vague sounds again of people jabbering far away for quite a long time. Then another voice spoke in metallic sound.

"Ivo speaking. Hullo, Adrian, old boy! You seem to have shifted your whereabouts. . . . I don't know this house. . . . It's new to me."

Professor Boyd was making notes on some slips of paper which he had brought for that purpose. Writing in the dark, many of his words were illegible as he afterwards found, but he guessed at them, or rather put them in from what he remembered. Once he was called to order by Jago who said, "I hear some paper rustling." But he took no notice of this and let the sheets drop to the floor as he finished them, seeing the whiteness of the paper by the very faint light that came through the blinds.

He was taking down the words spoken by the spirit voice and they remain as a record, more accurate perhaps than those remembered by Rose and Mallard, except for a few missing sentences and illegible words.

"There's something I want to tell you. . . . It's about Eve."

Boyd said he did not hear the word as "Evelyn," but both Rose and Mallard were quite sure of that.

"She's on the sea somewhere. . . . Blue sea. . . . Bright sun. Very warm. . . . Mediterranean. . . . I stood near her. . . . There was a man . . . tall . . . good-looking . . . couldn't remember."

Here there was a gap in Boyd's notes, followed by three or four illegible words which he said were "amorous" and "evil passion." Rose and Mallard agreed.

"She's not loyal, Adrian. . . . Not loyal, old boy. . . . Wants watching. . . . And jealous. . . . Jealous of Rose. . . . Freddy laughs about Rose. Freddy. The rotter."

There was a long silence after that. Boyd put a note on his slip of paper: "Trumpet gets tired. Falls. Two minutes later rises again."

"I went Egypt . . . see old pal . . . Arthur. . . . I'm bringing back souvenir. . . . In this room. . . . Egyptian. . . . Present from Ivo. . . . Hullo, hullo!"

That was as far as Boyd could go in his notes. He had finished his slips of paper and was afraid to stoop down and pick them up to write on the other side. In any case, he was interested in the girl by his side, Jago's girl. Now that his eyes were becoming more accustomed to the darkness he was almost certain that she was leaning forward in her chair, and that there was something sticking out of her mouth—some dark thing like a rod or tube. Also her breathing was peculiar and suspicious. Sometimes he could not hear her breathing at all. At other times he could hear her taking long-drawn breaths.

The voice through the trumpet was saying something about the sea again, and Egyptian pyramids, and hot burning sands.

Boyd rose quietly from his chair. He had made up his mind to grab that girl by his side and hold her until someone turned up the light. He was not at all sure that she wasn't making that voice sound through the trumpet by some kind of trick, although she was three paces away from the table.

"Sorry!" he said suddenly.

His hands grabbed her and she gave a scream of terror. Instantly the trumpet dropped with a clatter to the table. She was struggling in his hands, squirming like a slippery eel.

"What on earth!" exclaimed Mallard.

Emery Jago's voice rang out harshly.

"This is abominable! Turn up the light someone."

It was Wilfred Neal who switched on the electric light, and every one was dazzled and blinking.

Boyd still held Belle Chubb by one arm.

"Sorry," he said again. "I began to get suspicious. This young lady——"

He was feeling her about her thin flat chest and then passed his hand across her lap.

"Oh!" she cried. "You made me jump out of my skin almost. . . . It isn't fair."

"I must protest," shouted Emery angrily. "I thought I'd come to a gentleman's house."

His eyes blazed with a sudden rage out of a dead-white face. Then he spoke to the girl he called his sister.

"Are you all right, Belle?"

"It's quite all right, Em," she answered, and the suspicious Boyd noticed that she said, "*It's* quite all right," and not "*I am* quite all right."

At this assurance Jago became less angry and turned round to Mallard with a remonstrance against Professor Boyd's behaviour.

"It doesn't give the spirits a chance," he said. "It's hardly fair or decent, sir, as I think you will agree. How can you expect to talk to your brother when the whole thing is jangled by hostile interruptions? I'm ready to submit to every kind of test but not to sheer brutality like this."

"I think you went too far, Boyd," said Mallard. "Honestly, I can't think what you were trying to do."

Boyd apologized with a nervous laugh.

"Frightfully sorry, everyone! But certain breathing exercises on the part of Miss Jago rather aroused my suspicious nature. Also the way she was sitting forward and something she seemed to have in her mouth. Probably I was mistaken. In the darkness one can't be

certain of anything and one's nerves begin to work. That's why this sort of thing never results in good evidence."

He stooped to pick up his notes and crumpled them into his breast pocket.

It was Rose Jaffrey who gave a suddden cry of astonishment.

She was standing close to the table where the trumpet lay, and seemed to be staring at something which was next to the trumpet, as though she could not believe the evidence of her eyes.

"What?" asked Mallard anxiously. "What, Rose?"

Then he too murmured a word of surprise.

"Anything startling?" asked Boyd, going toward them while young Neal strolled up and raised his eyebrows.

"That's strange!" said Emery Jago. "Has anybody seen this thing before?"

Standing on the table there by the side of the tin trumpet was the figure of an Egyptian god, with a tall headdress and pointed beard. It was a bronze—green with age and much dented—on a wooden pedestal.

"Osiris!" said young Neal, who had been to Egypt for a winter in Cairo.

He took the figure up and examined it curiously, and then glanced at Mallard with a smile of incredulity.

"Probably a fake," he said. "They make these things by the thousand for American tourists and others."

"It looks real to me," said Mr. Jaffrey. "They don't fake the hand of time like this. Look how green it is! The point is, how did it come on to that table, gentlemen?"

"It was certainly not in this house before," said Mallard. His hand shook as he took the figure from Mr. Jaffrey.

"What's your explanation, Mr. Jago?" asked Rose. Emery shrugged his shoulders slightly and smiled at her.

"I have no doubt myself, Miss Jaffrey," he said quietly. "It's what we call an 'apport.' Young Ivo has conveyed it from Egypt to this room. That's my theory. I may be wrong."

He turned to Mallard and questioned him politely.

"Didn't the voice say something about the Mediterranean, and the Egyptian desert?"

"Yes," said Mallard.

"He mentioned some lady's name," said Emery Jago. "What was it, Belle? Did you catch it?"

"Evelyn," said Belle in a low voice. "That's what I heard, Em."

Mallard did not tell him that Evelyn was the name of his wife and that she was cruising on the Mediterranean with Freddy Duke, whose name had also been mentioned. He was asking himself if there was any possible way in which this medium could have heard of his wife's voyage with that good-looking blackguard. He could think of no way—unless Boyd had told him, or Rose. Who else knew in this neighbourhood or in London? His man, Sadler, perhaps. Sadler knew everything, overhearing telephone conversations, reading letters, perhaps, which Mallard left carelessly about.

But Sadler could not have talked much with this fellow Jago, who was down at the cottage, and in any case would not chatter to a stranger about his master's business.

He heard Boyd speaking.

"You might have had it concealed about you, Jago. You must admit that."

"You searched me, Mr. Boyd," replied Jago calmly, as though utterly indifferent to this suspicion.

"Not properly," said Boyd. "I'm entirely unconvinced. Your sister may have had it under her frock. We're not children, you know."

"Perhaps if you were more childlike," said Emery Jago gravely, "you might learn more of the spirit world."

He turned to Rose Jaffrey.

"What do *you* think?" he asked. "Are you so sceptical?"

She looked into his eyes.

"I don't know what to think," she said in a troubled way. "It makes me feel—frightened."

He smiled at her.

"It's comforting, really, when one looks at it in the right way. I should say you had the psychic gift, Miss

Jaffrey. I wouldn't be surprised if you could get into touch with the other side—quite easily."

"Oh, I don't want to," she said quickly, and turned away from him and went over to Mallard, as though she had no need of the other side while he was near her.

"Gentlemen," announced Mr. Jaffrey in a solemn voice. "I for one am utterly convinced that we have been privileged to get a glimpse through the great gate.

> "Our doubts are traitors,
> And make us lose the good we oft might win
> By fearing to attempt.'

"Let us not be afraid of attempting to cross that narrow bridge between Time and Eternity."

He spoke for some time with Jago and invited him to hold his next séance in the old house at the end of the lane.

"Don't you approve, Mallard?" he asked. "What better atmosphere than my old house for spiritual communications? It vibrates with the spirits of the past."

"Haunted?" asked Jago curiously.

"Beyond a doubt," said Mr. Jaffrey.

Emery Jago was thoughtful.

"I might try a few spirit photographs," he suggested. "At the worst I should only waste a few plates."

That night, when Rose and Jaffrey had gone and the brother and sister had been taken back to the cottage by young Neal, Mallard came into Boyd's room again.

"Boyd," he said, "tell me. How *did* that fellow know about Evelyn and Freddy Duke—and that Mediterranean cruise?"

Boyd who was smoking his last pipe laughed.

"The voice called him 'Dook.' . . . And that gardener's wife—Mrs. Lymposs—doesn't she gossip a good deal, old man?"

Mallard was rather disturbed by that suggestion.

"She certainly chatters. I never thought of that. But she doesn't know about Evelyn."

"These things leak out," said Boyd. "Mrs. Smith's butler tells Mrs. Jones's maid. It's the freemasonry of the servants' hall."

Mallard shook his head.

"There's more in it than that. I recognized Ivo's voice. I could swear to it."

"I wouldn't if I were you," said Boyd. "Auto-suggestion beats everything. You can't trust your own senses. I could have sworn I saw something sticking out of that girl's mouth when the voice was speaking. I'm not at all sure I didn't. But it's quite possible I was wrong. She had nothing in her hands when the light came up."

"Can we be sure of anything?" asked Mallard.

He went to the window and stood there looking into the garden, white under the moonlight. Boyd heard him give a heavy sigh before presently he turned and left the room with a quiet word or two.

"Good night, old sceptic. Sleep well."

XII

On the afternoon of the next day, Belle Chubb, as she had been in the old days—Belle Jago as she now called herself—went round to have tea alone with Rose at the old house, and took her crystal with her.

Emery had arranged to come on later to see what he could do in the way of spirit photographs before the second séance; he was spending his day with Professor Boyd who was making some tests in thought-transference—rather startling, as he confessed to Mallard that day at lunch.

There was no doubt, he thought, that Jago possessed something that might be called supernormal sensibility. At least he had succeeded in reproducing certain drawings of elementary objects—such as a circle with a triangle on top, a flag with a cross, a five-pointed star, and most difficult of all, the profile of a man's face which Boyd had drawn in the library, concealed behind a screen—and he had then sealed them in envelopes before Jago had touched them with the tips of his fingers. He had made several mistakes. For instance, he had drawn the flag the wrong way round, and he had put the triangle underneath instead of on top of the circle, and his reproduction of the man's face had omitted the eye. But those slight errors did not take away from the inevitable conviction that he had some kind of mental vision or some sensibility to images in Boyd's mind, which was outside the range of normal experience. Well, it had been an interesting morning for Boyd, and he was rather taken with that fellow Jago, although not at all convinced that he was not a tricky customer, mixing up fraud with certain gifts of supersensibility.

"By the by, Mallard," said Boyd, "he was rather

interested in that portrait of Ivo over the library fireplace. Kept staring at it, as though it fascinated him."

"Why not?" asked Mallard. "If Ivo was really speaking through that trumpet——"

He caught a glance from young Neal and flushed slightly. The boy was smiling with ironical disbelief.

"Not that I'm convinced," said Mallard, flinching a little under that scepticism of youth.

"Absolute bunk, sir!" said young Neal. "As for that Egyptian god—old Osiris—I'm convinced the fellow bought it off some dealer in fake antiques."

Mallard was rather nettled.

"Your convictions, Billy, seem to me based on prejudice rather than evidence. We're not all Catholics, you know."

"Sorry, sir," said young Neal.

There was rather a painful silence broken by a good-humoured laugh from Mallard.

"This kind of thing mustn't get on our nerves. And I withdraw that remark about Catholics, young fellow. I wish to Heaven——"

He broke off from that line of thought abruptly and changed the subject.

"What about some tennis this afternoon, Billy?"

"Oh, splendid!" said the boy. "I'm pining for a game."

"Good! I'll meet you on the court at three o'clock."

Boyd raised his eyebrows, and looked alarmed.

"If I were you, old man——"

Mallard smiled at him in a challenging way, like a schoolboy who has made up his mind to play truant.

"I'm feeling as fit as a fiddle. This lazy life down here has made a new man of me."

Boyd waited till after lunch, when Billy went off to change, before making another protest.

"That game of tennis!" he said. "It's madness, old man. You mustn't do it."

"Oh, I shall go easy," said Mallard. "There's no risk."

"It's a hellish risk," said Boyd angrily. "Don't be a damn' fool, Mallard."

Mallard laughed with the old light in his eyes. All

through lunch Boyd had noticed some change in him, as though a cloud had passed from his mind.

"The fact is," he said quietly, "I slipped away this morning—while you were busy with that fellow Jago—and paid a visit to the local vet. I mean my old friend Dr. Harding. He pooh-poohs that Harley Street man. Says my heart is as sound as a bell, except for a bit of a jolt due to overwork and slight strain. He's not at all against a moderate amount of exercise. . . . So that's that, and I feel much more cheerful—after weeks of morbid terrors of which I'm thoroughly ashamed."

Boyd was not so enthusiastic as he ought to have been.

"It sounds good," he said. "Amazingly good, old man. But if I were you I wouldn't risk things. That specialist in Harley Street——"

Mallard denounced all specialists as charlatans and cranks. He ought to have known better than pay the slightest attention to any of them. His experience as a lawyer might have taught him that. In the criminal courts it was always a perfect joke to hear specialists contradicting each other with the utmost assurance. You could get a specialist to say any damn' thing, even when a man's life was at stake. He believed in the good old general practitioner who took a man's constitution and general habits of life, and didn't fasten on some particular organ, as though it were utterly unrelated to other organs. He believed in the local "vets," as he called them. Anyhow, old Harding had given him a new lease of life and hope.

"My dear old man!" said Boyd, and grabbed Mallard's arm affectionately.

Mallard thumped him in the chest and rumpled his red hair.

"You come and watch me take down Billy's pride!" he said. "God, it's a frightful time since I held a racket in my hand."

He went to put on flannels and Boyd watched him win at six-two, six-five, six-love. He played with all his old grace and form with that perfect forehand drive which was untakable by young Neal.

And at the end of it he seemed perfectly fit and untired. It was Billy who looked baked as he gave a

salute to Mallard. "Couldn't give you a game, sir. You made rings round me. Wow!"

"It's all in the placing," said Mallard. "And you're a bit weak with the backhand stroke. Look here, let me give you a tip about your foot-work."

He put himself into the right position for taking a ball with a backhand swipe. It was the old Mallard again, with his old smiling egotism, this love of games with himself as champion.

XIII

ROUND at the old house at the bottom of the lane, Belle Chubb had a quiet afternoon with Rose Jaffrey, whose father had gone out to see some friends in the neighbourhood. They had the place to themselves.

Belle was less shy now though not very talkative at first. Rose took her round the garden and showed her the flowers, which she seemed to like, and a brood of young chicks, which called to some mother-love in this white-faced girl. She gave a scream of delight and said, "Aren't they darlings!" and took one up in her hands to kiss its fluffy little body.

Afterward they sat on the lawn, so soft and closely mown, under the shade of a big old cedar tree, and these two girls made a strange contrast of which perhaps they were both conscious now and then: Rose in a summer frock with long sleeves through which her arms showed, and Belle in her little black slip, rather shabby and worn, with her thin legs tucked under it.

"You're lucky!" said Belle, after there had been a moment's silence between them. She looked up at Rose with a sideways glance, and then picked a blade of grass and put it between her lips.

"What makes you think that?" asked Rose smiling at her.

Belle Chubb shrugged her thin shoulders.

"All the blooming luck, I should say! Better than life in Brixton, I don't think."

"Aren't you happy in Brixton?" asked Rose. "I dare say life can be just as good there."

"Think so?" asked Belle with dark irony.

She laughed with a shrill note in her voice.

"Not much fun over a photographer's shop with the trams going by, and nothing but crystal-gazing, with the blinds pulled down. I used to be a dancing girl—in the

Turvey Troupe—before I took up with Em. I mean before we set up as mediums, and all that. That wasn't much of a life either, come to think of it."

She laughed again and said: "God, I'd say it wasn't—not with a drunken dad and dirty agents, and all that! Not that you don't know. You're an actress yourself, Em tells me."

"Yes," said Rose, "but I suppose I've been lucky, as you say. I've never been really poor. Perhaps I've missed something. Experience."

"Oh, you belong to the smart brigade!" said Belle. "There's actresses and actresses. Young fellows to take you out in cars and all that. Pretty frocks and—this sort of thing."

She looked round the garden with a smile about her pale lips.

"I'd give anything to be with flowers and things. Country life appeals to me, I must say. Always did when I was on tour with the other girls. They couldn't stick it, most of them. Em doesn't like it, neither. Too quiet for him. Why, last night he kept listening at the window and said it felt as quiet as death. Got the jim-jams, the silly!"

"He looks nervous," said Rose. "I dare say it's the life he leads. It must be rather—well—unhealthy."

Belle Chubb nodded.

"Devastating!" she said, using a word which she may have learned from Emery, or on tour in those dancing days.

Rose asked a question which had been in her mind most of the afternoon. But even now she hesitated to ask it. It seemed hardly fair, and she had always playedfair.

"Does he believe in all that? I mean the spirit voices, and so on. Is he quite sincere about it?"

Belle suddenly took fright. At least she answered cautiously, with a furtive look at Rose Jaffrey.

"Oh, he believes all right. Mostly! Of course sometimes one can't tell what's true and what isn't. Em doesn't dogmatize."

"And you?" asked Rose. "Do *you* believe in the spirits?"

Belle seemed to be struggling between a desire for

truthfulness and professional caution. For a moment perhaps she leaned to the side of truth, in this garden with this friendly actress, so pretty and kind, with those flowers looking innocent.

"I hate the whole business. I wish I'd never had nothing to do with it, I tell you straight. But I see things in the crystal, sometimes. Pictures. Faces and things. One has to believe, as far as that goes, I will say."

"How strange!" said Rose. "It's all very mysterious. Sometimes I feel frightened when I think of these things."

Belle was silent again for a minute. Perhaps she thought she had said too much, for when she spoke again it was in a sullen way, and as though she were repeating her professional patter.

"Em knows all about it. It's the supernormal faculties and psychic energy. We get into touch with the infinite. Em can explain it all, if you want to know. Psychological phenomena, and all that!"

Presently she gathered up her thin legs and stood up with her hands pressing back her fluffy hair.

"Hadn't we better do a bit of crystal-gazing?" she asked. "Business is business, and that's what you asked me for, wasn't it?"

"No," said Rose truthfully. "I asked you to see my garden. Don't let's bother about the crystal."

"It's my job," said Belle. "I left it in the summer-house in a bit of brown paper. We may as well get on with it. Em will be angry if I play about all the time."

She insisted on fetching it, and sat down again under the shade of the cedar tree with the crystal on her lap and her head bent over it.

"I don't know whether it'll work out of doors," she said. "I've never tried before."

"Queer little creature!" thought Rose, and she felt sorry for the child and yet was curious to know if she could see anything.

She saw nothing for quite a long time. Once she said, "Oh, damn it!" as if angry with it, and fretful.

Then suddenly she began to speak in a low voice.

"I see a face. It's a man's face. Clean-shaven. Middle-aged. Grey hair. It's a sharp kind of face.

Why, it's Mr. Mallard. Same as he was last night—only different somehow. Wearing white things. Not well, it seems to me. Looks ill. In pain, I should say. Struggling with himself. . . . That's funny ! . . . He's fallen down. He's——"

She had her thin fingers crisped round the crystal, but suddenly she pushed it sharply off her lap so that it rolled on to the smooth grass and lay there with the sun sparkling on it.

"Oh, it's all rot ! " she said. "One imagines it all. It's silly ! "

She stared curiously at Rose Jaffrey who was looking at her with frightened eyes.

"Don't you get scared," she said. "It's the subconscious mind. That's all. That's what Em says when he wants to be scientific."

"You've frightened me ! " said Rose. "Mr. Mallard——"

One hand crept to her breast.

"He's your lover, isn't he ? " asked Belle.

"Yes," said Rose. "My lover. My love ! . . . What did you see ? . . . That last picture . . ."

"It was all fancy," said Belle. "One sees what one thinks of. Last night, at the séance, I was took up with him because of his handsome face and his kindness to me. It's always like that, as a rule. It's like dreaming when you're awake. I'm sorry if I scared you. Honest, I am."

It was only ten minutes later that Mallard came into the garden with Boyd and Emery Jago and Wilfred Neal. He was still in flannels open at the neck after his victory on the tennis court.

"We've had a great game," he said cheerfully. "My first for weeks."

"And he flogged me round the court," said young Neal, laughing. "Great form ! "

"How white you are, my dear," said Mallard, going up to Rose and taking her hand.

"It's the sun," she said. "Rather too hot without a hat."

She put a hand on his arm and the colour came back into her face. She had never seen her dear egoist looking so well and happy.

XIV

That afternoon Emery Jago took some photographs of Mallard and Rose in the drawing-room of the old house, and then went upstairs with Belle and Mr. Jaffrey (who had come back to tea) and exposed some plates in the bedroom with the little powder closet which was supposed to be haunted. There was just a chance, he said, that he might get a spirit photograph, although he was very doubtful about it. There would be more likelihood, he thought, of getting some result at a séance with several people present and putting themselves into spiritual receptivity. Still, he said, it might be worth while wasting a few plates on the chance of getting a snap of any earth-bound spirit who might pass by. He was certain the house was haunted, and even Belle admitted that she felt "funny" in that room upstairs where the old lady was supposed to walk. Perhaps it was the effect of the four-poster bed with its hangings of green brocade which made Belle have "the creeps" in this room, as she confessed to Mr. Jaffrey.

"I wouldn't sleep in that bed for nuts," she said. "It would make me dream something awful."

He told her that Rose slept in it every night—without spoiling her complexion—but he quite agreed that the room gave him a sense of uneasiness since he had heard the story of the little old lady lady who disappeared into the powder closet. He was very much interested in Emery Jago's idea of exposing some specially sensitive plates, and arranged for him to develop them in the dressing-room at the other end of the passage.

Mallard was left alone with Rose while the photography was going on, young Neal strolling off to invite Boyd down to tea as otherwise he might feel deserted.

They went out into the garden again and Rose watched Mallard make a few shots with the croquet balls, hitting

the stick from the far end of the lawn with a skill that was aided perhaps by a little luck.

"My eye is as good as ever it was!" he said, boyishly pleased with himself. "I took down Billy's pride just now. He thought he was going to give the old 'un an awful whopping!"

He looked happy after that victory. Rose had never seen him looking so bronzed, and well, and splendid. Lately, she thought, he had been melancholy sometimes, as though some shadow were on his mind—Evelyn's desertion of him—but this afternoon that touch of gloom had passed and his voice had its old gay and careless ring. An "old 'un" he called himself, but that was ridiculous. In his white flannels open at the neck as Orpen had painted him, he looked not very much older than Billy, unless one noticed the silver threads in his hair and a few lines about his eyes.

"I'm like a kid when I see a ball of any kind," he said, and came over to her with the croquet mallet under his arm.

She offered to play him a game, but with sudden contrition he remembered that she had complained of the sun, and he suggested a shady place—under the cedar tree—where they could sit and look at the view and talk if they felt like that, or keep silent if it seemed better. She had the gift of beautiful silences, he told her.

It was not one of his own gifts, as she reminded him with a smiling candour, but as a matter of fact he kept silence for quite a time, leaning back in a deck-chair with his hands clasped behind his head while she sat on the grass by his side with her head against his knee. She was half inclined to tell him of that fright she had when that girl had seen him in the crystal. It had given her a shock for a few moments of foolish terror, until he had come into the garden laughing and cheery after his game of tennis. It showed how foolish it was to let one's imagination be caught hold of by that kind of thing. She wished her dear egoist had not become so much interested in spiritualism. It was all rather alarming—and morbid in a way, she thought. She wondered what had made him attracted by it suddenly. It was his love for Ivo, perhaps. He had never really got

over his grief at that boy's death and always spoke of him as though he had been endowed with all virtue and knightliness.

"How charming it is here!" he said presently. "How good life is in old gardens like this with the sun warm on one's face and a sense of happiness in one's soul."

"What makes you so happy to-day?" she asked. "I saw it in your eyes when you came in with Billy. A shadow lifted!"

He was tempted to tell her about that sentence of death from which he had been reprieved now—all the agony he had gone through because of that infernal specialist and the young jackanapes from the hotel in Knightsbridge. One day he would tell her all that. . . . So she had noticed a shadow and its sudden lifting! She seemed to notice the slightest change in him, and all his play-acting had not deceived her about that melancholy which had settled down on him until this new hope of life and health.

"I oughtn't to feel so merry and bright to-day," he said. "I had a letter from Evelyn by the morning's mail. She's not coming back. She and Freddy Duke are staying in Cairo. They will be glad if I hurry up the divorce business! . . . I suppose I ought to rage and storm, but somehow I don't feel like it. I only feel glad to be here in this garden, with the sun on my face, and your dear head against my knee, and a complete sense of well-being."

"I'm glad," said Rose.

He touched her hair for a moment caressingly before he gave a light-hearted laugh.

"'God's in His Heaven: All's right with the world!' . . . I shouldn't be surprised if you have strawberries and cream for tea."

"I have," said Rose. "But I'm sorry about Evelyn. For her sake."

"Poor little Evelyn!" said Mallard, and in his sigh was all the remembrance of that marriage which had begun in love.

Then he made a quick gesture as though thrusting a brief on one side impatiently.

"That case is finished. I'm afraid the verdict is

against me. One of my failures. . . . Well, I'm not going to let it take the colour out of this garden or the scent out of those flowers—or the happiness out of my heart. I'm afraid I'm still an egoist. Self-preservation is the first law of life."

"Bless your happiness," she said, and shifted a little on the grass to look up into his face. Why did he look so happy this afternoon?

He looked down at her, smiling, as though he read that question in her eyes.

"I'm afraid it's physical, partly," he said. "Queer how the body and brain react! That game of tennis set my circulation going, I suppose. But it's spiritual, too, I hope. It seems silly to say so, but somehow I feel a kind of assurance that the next world—the other side—is not merely an illusion of the human mind anxious for survival. I believe it's true. I believe there's God—some spirit of Goodness—behind all this."

He looked across the croquet lawn to the woods and the line of hills beyond the garden, shimmering under the warm sunlight.

"Who's converted you, sceptic?" asked Rose. "Emery Jago and his tin trumpet?"

She spoke almost flippantly, but there was a tremor in her voice, and she took one of his hands and put it to her lips.

"Not that," he said, "though I think there's something in it. . . . I wouldn't say it wasn't Ivo. . . . But I think it was those words which we spelled out with the glass that night. They keep ringing through my head. 'Love has no death and spirits meet across the bridge.' Boyd says they came out of my subconscious mind. Very likely! But wherever they came from they seem to express some faith in me, and that's good enough. Lately I've been groping through darkness like a man in a tunnel. Now I seem to have come out of the tunnel, quite suddenly. It's as though I was aware of the spirit—God, if you like—in all this beauty about us. I feel like the fellow in John Masefield's poem. 'The Everlasting Mercy,' wasn't it?"

"Teach me," said Rose quietly. For a moment there was a faint mist of tears in her eyes.

Mallard laughed.

"Oh, it's all very vague! Only an acute sense of happiness, with hope ahead."

"Let me share it!" she pleaded. "Give me half your hope."

He looked down and saw her up-turned face, and for a moment, which seemed a long time, he looked into her eyes with a kind of wistfulness for the beauty of her face and all the loveliness in her.

"All that I have is yours," he answered, gravely. "All my love, as you have long known, Rose. The love of a middle-aged man growing grey."

"No!" she said. "A lover's love. My dear, my dear!"

She was on her knees on the lawn under the old tree through which the sunlight came touching her hair. Her hands, those exquisite hands which people watched when she played her parts, faltered up to his chest with a caressing touch and she bent her head toward him. He took her head in his hands and kissed her on the forehead and then once on the lips, as her body rested against him.

"An eternal pledge," he said presently, when she had drawn away again with a deep flush of colour in her face. "Love everlasting, my dear, between your soul and mine. Is that a promise?"

"And thereto I plight thee my troth," she answered, and though she smiled her eyes were wet.

They both rose and stood together, holding hands, as Mr. Jaffrey came out of the house calling them.

"Rose! . . . Mallard, my dear friend."

"What is it, Father?" asked Rose.

He did not notice their emotion nor the flame of colour in her face.

"Come!" he said. "There are wonders and portents in the house. That remarkable young man has been developing his photographs. One of them is very startling. It's the one he took of our friend here in the drawing-room. There is a spirit face above his shoulder. Beyond any doubt."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Mallard. "Whose face?"

"Perhaps it is for you to say," answered Mr. Jaffrey gravely.

He put his hand on Mallard's shoulder and an arm round his daughter's waist and led them back into the house.

In the drawing-room, Jago was examining some wet prints from a small dish filled with hypo. He was holding one up to the light.

"It certainly looks like a face," he said.

Belle Chubb was on the other side of the table and looked sharply at Mallard when he came in.

"You see, Mallard," said Mr. Jaffrey, "it's the one Mr. Jago took when you were standing by the fireplace. Observe that luminous patch above your right shoulder. In the centre of it is the face of a young man, very distinct. Have a look."

Mallard took up the print and stared at it, and for a moment his face became pale.

"It's Ivo's face," he said. "Ivo—as I last saw him. . . ."

There was silence in the room as though all of them were startled and awestruck by this recognition.

"There is no death!" said Mr. Jaffrey.

The words he spoke reminded him of some quotation from his inexhaustible store of memory and he declaimed the lines in his rich, reverberating voice:

> "There is no death! What seems so is transition;
> This life of mortal breath
> Is but a suburb of the life elysian
> Whose portal we call Death."

Rose Jaffrey leaned over Mallard's shoulder and stared at the wet print.

"Are you certain?" she asked tremulously.

"There's no doubt about it," said Mallard. "It's like that portrait over my fireplace. The same poise of the head, and the smiling eyes, rather ironical of life."

"Yes," said Emery, "I noticed that portrait. I was almost certain it must be your brother. Wasn't I, Belle?"

"Yes, Em," said the girl.

He gave a possible explanation of the phenomenon, doubtfully.

"Of course that image on the plate may have been a

projection of some mental memory of mine. I may have retained the vibrations of that portrait and then transferred them somehow on to the negative. If you don't care to believe in a psychic interpretation—and it's very risky—there may be some natural explanation—the mind operating in a mysterious way. Not that I pretend to understand that sort of thing. Professor Boyd might give a better theory."

"Confound old red-head!" said Mr. Jaffrey impatiently. "I confess he annoys me sometimes by his deliberate materialism. What do *you* think, my dear sir?"

"I——" Mallard answered quietly. "I prefer to think that Ivo has been here—that he is here now. Lately I have seemed to be aware of him close to me, with a sense of comradeship. It sounds rather foolish, but I can't express it in any other way."

"It's probably true," said Emery Jago. "It's the fundamental idea of our psychic faith."

"Of all faith," said Mr. Jaffrey.

That evening, after tea, Mallard walked home with Boyd and young Neal. They had arranged to return after supper for a séance in the old house where Emery Jago and Belle were staying on, at Mr. Jaffrey's invitation. Mallard was whistling as he went up the lane a line or two from one of Chopin's preludes which Rose had played one night. He walked ahead a few yards at a brisk pace, Boyd lagging behind with Billy discussing that spirit photograph which both of them declined to believe.

"I believe it's a deliberate fake," said Boyd. "That fellow Jago photographed the portrait over Mallard's fireplace and then exposed it on the same plate with Mallard, in Miss Jaffrey's drawing-room."

"I agree," said Billy, "although I must admit there were one or two differences. The collar was not the same."

"Oh, he may have retouched it a bit," said Boyd. "That's easy, I imagine."

"Mr. Mallard believes in it," said Billy. "He was quite angry when I expressed my doubts."

"He's a bit emotional," said Boyd. "Most lawyers are, I notice, although it's against the popular idea. Besides——"

He checked himself, not caring to say anything about the emotional crisis which Mallard had been passing through because of that shock about his health, before going to see the local "vet" as he called that respectable old doctor in the neighbourhood who had pooh-poohed the specialist.

Mallard turned suddenly, checking his pace.

"Come on, you laggards!"

He laughed at them and waited until they came up, and then put his hands on Billy's shoulder.

"Well, young fellow, how are you feeling about that tennis of ours?"

"A bit stiff, I admit," said young Neal.

"Lord! This modern youth!" Mallard exclaimed, giving the boy's shoulder a friendly punch. "I'm game for a ten mile walk."

"Go easy, old man," said Boyd.

Mallard laughed cheerily.

"Hark at our scientist, with his creaking bones and blear eyes. Come on, Boyd. Brisk up!"

But he stopped again at the turn of the lane to look over a gate at the distant view across his own field.

"Pretty good, that," he said. "Wonderfully good!"

The sun had caught the tops of the distant trees with their massed foliage, setting them on fire, it seemed, in a splendour of golden light, while the hills beyond were a long line of deepest purple.

"'God's in His Heaven! All's right with the world!'" cried Mallard, raising his hands with a gesture of triumphant faith.

"Don't you believe it," said Boyd. "Not so far as the world is concerned. It's all wrong!"

"No," said Mallard. "Not for those who have a sense of beauty, and good-will in their hearts, and some touch of faith in a life beyond. Like Billy, here. Eh?"

Like himself now, though perhaps he didn't care to say so. Remembering his words with Rose, it is easy to guess why he felt happy and uplifted. She had pledged her love to him, in a spiritual way, unspoiled by passion. Perhaps, too, that letter from Evelyn had given him a sense of freedom, although he had resolved not to make use of it yet to speak of marriage.

Probably he was right in thinking that his sense of physical fitness and his new hope of health were the chief causes of his exaltation of spirits. That was his egotism again and the animal man eager for self preservation. And yet one cannot underestimate the sense of spiritual awakening that had come to him like a sudden conversion from his old scepticism. Rose's love again had something to do with that, and perhaps those experiences of Emery Jago's which had certainly influenced his mind and turned his thoughts to the mysteries of life and death. It was curious, for instance, that he had that awareness of Ivo's presence, apart altogether from spirit photographs and spirit voices. Even Boyd was startled by the gladness and vivacity of his face when he turned and spoke to young Neal.

"Billy," he said, with a challenging look, "I'll vault you over this gate for sixpence! One hand, and over you go."

"Nothing doing," said young Neal. "I'm too stiff, sir."

"Well, watch me."

"Be careful, old man," said Boyd.

Mallard laughed, touched the gate with one hand, and was over with a bound, gracefully, lightly, like a Greek athlete.

"Your sixpence!" said Billy.

Then Boyd gave a cry of alarm.

Mallard stood for a moment in the field with his left hand pressed tightly against his ribs.

"That's funny!" he said. "That's ——."

He gave a groan and staggered a pace or two and fell with a kind of sideways spin, with his left arm twisted under his body and his face in the grass.

"Good heavens!" said Billy. "He's hurt himself!"

He was over the gate in a second stooping over the man to whom he owed most things in life.

Boyd climbed over the gate, catching his foot in one of the rungs and falling over the other side. He struggled up and ran to Mallard and stood over him shouting angry and almost blasphemous words.

"You fool! . . . You damned fool! . . . Didn't I warn you? . . . What the hell did you do that for, Mallard, old man? . . . Oh, my God! Oh, Christ!"

"What's the matter with him?" asked young Neal,

turning round with a dead white face and looking at Mallard.

"Go and fetch some brandy," shouted Boyd, "and look quick about it. You damn' little fool. All this blasted sport——"

He spoke as though it were Billy's fault, that vaulting over the gate, this collapse of Mallard.

Young Neal ran like a hare to the old cottage at the end of the lane. Rose Jaffrey was in the garden with Belle Chubb, picking some flowers for her table.

"Hullo!" she said as the boy dashed in. "Who's in a hurry?"

"Brandy!" he said, breathlessly. "Mr. Mallard—he's very ill."

For a second or less Rose Jaffrey stared at him while all the colour died in her face. She looked at Belle Chubb with a sudden terror in her eyes, remembering something. Then she fled into the house to fetch the brandy.

"Is he dead?" asked Belle Chubb, in a toneless voice. She, too, who was always white was now more blanched, remembering something she had seen in a crystal.

"Dead?" said young Neal. "No, of course not. Good God, no! He was perfectly fit——"

Rose came out again with a little decanter of brandy. Its cut glass sparkled in the sun of that summer evening.

"Where?" she asked.

"The gate at the corner of the field."

He seized the brandy from her roughly, and dashed away without another word.

Rose ran after him, and caught him up. . . . Later when Mr. Jaffrey came with Belle Chubb and Emery Jago, they found her weeping over Mallard's body, kissing his face as he lay on his back staring up at the blue sky, with his white flannels open at the neck. Young Neal was leaning against the tree, his body shaken with sobs and one arm over his face, while Boyd, with the sun on fire in his red hair, strode up and down, raising his clenched fists in an anguish of rage and grief.

Adrian Mallard—so vital—so much in love with life—that "dear egoist" as Rose Jaffrey called him—had vaulted across the gate.

BOOK THREE

ROSE JAFFREY

I

For a week or two the news of Mallard's death was a shock to all his friends. Even for longer than that there were sympathetic references, at legal banquets and public dinners, to his death as a great loss to the Bar. Several of the judges expressed their regret at the sudden passing of an eminent and brilliant counsel who had maintained the highest traditions of the Law and had been clearly marked out for a most distinguished career, had he been spared.

Other men who had known him at Oxford and in private friendship spoke about him with a touch of emotion and a kind of incredulity that he of all men should have been struck down in the prime of life. "Mallard dead! Why, he seemed to have the gift of eternal youth—so vital and good at games, and all that. It makes one think a bit. 'In the midst of life' and so forth. . . . Poor old Mallard! One of the very best." Then he passed through the gates of forgetfulness. The living cannot afford to think much of the dead. After Chopin's Funeral March the band strikes up a cheerful tune for those who carry on. That's life.

A few remembered him more poignantly, just those who felt that some of their own life had died with him: his man, Sadler, who had served him with a silent devotion, and Professor Boyd, who had been his most intimate friend, and young Neal, who had regarded him with hero-worship, and Rose Jaffrey, who had loved him, and Evelyn, his wife, who had abandoned him. Out in Cairo, with that other man she had chosen, Evelyn wept bitterly for a time so that the other man was very much annoyed.

Rose Jaffrey was most stricken. She too, like Evelyn,

had wept her heart out, as they say, on the night of his death, frightening her father next morning by her look of anguish. He had guessed that there had been a little sentiment between his daughter and her distinguished friend but had never suspected that Rose had been so deeply in love with him nor he with her. Indeed it was only gradually, even now, that he realized how much love there had been between them, and the revelation was rather alarming to him, because it seemed likely to affect his daughter's career and happiness. She was ill toward the end of the summer and found it difficult—impossible even—to learn her part for that new play which was to give her a very great chance of reputation—Barrie's latest and most beautiful work, and one exactly suited to her personality and art.

He helped her to learn the book but she could not memorize the lines and broke down crying once when he bullied her a little.

"You put no spirit into it, my dear! You haven't your heart in it."

"My heart bleeds," she said, and burst into tears.

He was angry with her. Her genius, her art, all the tradition he had bequeathed to her, all his teaching seemed to matter nothing to her now. She was limp and listless at a time when all London was waiting for that new production. She refused to see the photographers and interviewers who came down to the old house for advance publicity, and to Mr. Jaffrey that was very disappointing. So much good advertisement wasted! So much fame thrown away because of her megrims! After all, Mallard was a middle-aged man. It was absurd of her to fret so much over his death. A charming man, certainly, but not more than a good friend.

"I loved him," she said with another rush of tears. "I shall never love anybody else, Father."

"My dear," he said, "you will have a thousand lovers and one of them will be the right one. But you're young enough to wait, and your art must come first—for years to come."

He was startled and annoyed—even indignant—when Rose received a letter from a firm of solicitors informing

her that the late Mr. Adrian Mallard had left a will written the night before his death bequeathing her all his estate with the exception of a legacy to Wilfred Neal and some bequests to friends and servants. It included his country house with its furniture and pictures, and his furniture and personal belongings in his flat in town.

"Rose, darling," said Mr. Jaffrey, "I don't want to pry into your private affairs—and I am not narrow-minded or puritanical—but it seems to me very strange that our poor friend should have left you his fortune like this."

"Why strange, Father?" asked Rose rather coldly, as though she resented some suspicion in his mind.

Mr. Jaffrey hedged a little and his thin face flushed.

"You know the world, my dear! It always suspects the worst, especially of people in our profession."

"I was never his mistress, Father," said Rose, "if you mean that."

The candour in her eyes abashed him. He was shy of her when she looked at him like that and spoke so bluntly.

He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it before answering her.

"My little Rose! You and I know each other. I was only thinking of your reputation with a public that worships you. It's very precious to me."

"It means nothing at all to me," she said, and shocked him horribly. As an actor he had been the servant of the public. Their applause had been the breath of his life. Their love was the highest reward of any artist. If that meant nothing then art meant nothing—which was blasphemy.

"You ought to see a doctor," he told her. "I'm afraid you are rather unwell, my dear."

That was true, but no doctor could cure her. Mallard's death had left her with a sense of emptiness and desolation. It was only when he died that she knew how much she loved him. There had hardly been a hint of passion between them, except, perhaps, twice: once for a moment or two when she had been shy of something in his eyes and voice that day they had been together in the wood, and then again in the porch of the Compton church.

She had liked his friendship—perhaps it had flattered her—and she had smiled at his amusing egotism, and then gradually she had come to love him for his kindness. It was only on that afternoon when he had been so happy and had talked to her of life and faith that her heart had yearned toward him as a lover. She had leaned toward him and let him kiss her. She knew then that her soul was pledged to him, as he had said. But even then it was a spiritual pledge and she was only aware that she loved him with passion when he lay dead before her. Something died in her too at that time, or at least was dreadfully wounded. Something went out of the beauty of life, she thought. She was very broken. Even her courage went for a time so that she could not face up to her new part and shrank from its responsibilities. How could she face an audience again with the smiling charm of one of Barrie's women when she had much ado to keep herself from weeping?

It was only her remembrance of Mallard's mind—so many things he had said to her about himself—that made her go through with it all after those weeks of mourning and many tears. He had loved courage and the sporting spirit. "Whatever the adventure of life," he had said once, "let's go through with it without whining."

She remembered those words when she slipped round to his house—her's now!—one evening before going up to town for rehearsals. Professor Boyd was there looking over Mallard's papers and doing some work about the will—those bequests to friends—and for some time he talked gravely and tenderly of his friend whose loss he felt desperately. Then she left him and went about the house alone and shyly as though trespassing there, though most things belonged to her. She opened the wardrobe in his bedroom and put her face against some of his clothes hanging there, as though the touch of them brought her nearer to him. Once she spoke aloud, standing there in the bedroom with weak tears in her eyes, of which she was ashamed.

"Oh, my dear! Why did you go from me? My dear lover!"

The whole house was pervaded by his personality. Nothing had been touched since his death except his

papers. In his library a silver cigarette box lay open on the table, and on the tray by its side was a cigarette which he had lighted and then stubbed out after a whiff or two. His lips had touched it. In the window seat was the last book he had read, opened as when he had put it down to play that game of tennis with Billy. It was a book on psychology by McDougall and he had marked a passage about the supernormal senses. Over the fireplace was that portrait of him by Orpen. He was in flannels, just as she had seen him on the last day of his life, with his bare neck showing white in contrast to his bronzed face, only he was younger and very boyish, without the silver threads in his hair and the little lines about his eyes. She stood looking at it quite a long time with her face raised, and the painted eyes smiled at her. Dead? She could not believe it quite, though she had kissed his cold face and seen his body lowered into the grave of a country churchyard. She would have been frightened but not surprised if he had come into the room and stood beside her and said, "Hullo!" Those words came to her which they had spelled out together by the wine glass. "Love has no death and spirits meet beyond the bridge." Somewhere he was waiting for her as she had promised to wait for him. Perhaps even now he was watching her with smiling and pitiful eyes, sorry because she had lost her courage. She must get her courage back again and play the game as he would like her to play it. If he could speak to her from the other side of the bridge that surely was what he would say. "Courage, my dear, courage!" Perhaps if she spoke to him in her soul he would answer. He had believed in that toward the end. He had believed that Ivo had spoken to him through that trumpet. She had been sceptical and unbelieving—though rather frightened sometimes—until that girl had seen him in the crystal and foretold his death. Now she was sure of a spiritual existence beyond this life. Somewhere her dear egoist survived. There was only a thin partition between them. Perhaps not any partition. As she stood here in his room, his presence seemed near to her.

"My dear!" she said in a whisper. "Speak to me. Help me to be brave."

She stood with her face raised to his portrait, listening with all her senses for some answer from him. But there was no answer, and only the banging of a door by a gust of wind through the open window. It made her start and she felt her heart give a leap.

"My nerves are all wrong," she thought. "I shall have to be careful. . . . Courage!"

That visit to Mallard's house, and some sense of contact with his presence there, did give her a renewal of courage, and she made a vow to play the game as her lover would have wished. That night her father was surprised to hear her laugh again, and delighted when she offered to play him a game of chess, not guessing that she was forcing herself to take an interest in the little things of life and get back to cheerfulness.

She cried out for courage again in her dressing-room on the opening night of Barrie's play. It was true that her nerves were out of order and they played her a dreadful trick before she went on the stage. Every word of her part disappeared from her. She could not remember even her first line, and was panic-stricken.

"Good heavens!" she cried. "What on earth shall I do?"

Wilfred Neal had just left her, wishing her "the best of luck." She saw him very often now and loved his friendship because he spoke so much of Mallard and was a link with him. Other friends were in the house on this first night. Boyd was going to sit with her father in the second row of the stalls. Her unknown worshippers had been waiting in a queue since dawn, some of them all night. And now she was going to let them all down. Her mind was a complete blank. Not one word could she remember, and for the first time in her life she knew the horror of stage-fright.

"God help me!" she whispered, and leaned against the wall of her dressing-room with her hands clasped above her head.

The call came for her and she heard it with terror. She was going to make a fool of herself in public before all her friends and this crowded house.

Suddenly her mind called aloud to Mallard.

"Help me!" she cried inside her mind. "My dear,

my dear, I need you now! Come to me and give me courage!"

Someone was speaking to her inside the room.

"It's time, Miss Jaffrey. Less than half a minute. Aren't you well? Good Lord—how pale you look!"

It was the producer, very anxious on this first night, after smoking an endless chain of cigarettes all day at the dress-rehearsal.

"Coming!" she said. Strangely and suddenly her own nervousness passed from her completely as though some hand of grace had touched her. It was as though her friend had answered her. She had a conviction that he had heard her cry for help and that his spirit was close to her. She felt marvellously at ease, wonderfully confident. She was smiling when she slipped through the wings on to the stage and heard the greeting from all her friends in that crowded house, and they were all her friends that night.

"It is my dear egoist who is helping me," she said to herself. "I am playing to him."

That queer little smile of hers remained on her lips, and in her eyes, all through the play. It suited the part of the humorous lady who had been born in Barrie's brain. It was the theme of all the critics next day. "Miss Jaffrey," said one of them, "smiled with her soul. She not only played the part of Barrie's beautiful character, she lived in it. . . . We have few such actresses."

In the dressing-room after her many calls before the curtain her father flung his arms about her and kissed her on both cheeks, while Boyd and young Neal stood waiting with congratulations and an enthusiasm which made Boyd's lean face almost as red as his hair.

"Exquisite and perfect!" said Mr. Jaffrey. "Rose, my darling, I knew you could act, but not like that, not like that! You're a great artist. I'm very proud of you. You made your poor old father blub like a baby. Didn't she, Professor?"

"I didn't notice," said Boyd. "I was too busy blubbing myself. Miss Jaffrey, you've cured me of cynicism. I'm a wallowing sentimentalist, thanks to you and Barrie."

"I was playing to my friends," said Rose tremulously. "It was their love that helped me."

"It was perfectly topping," said young Neal. "Absolutely divine, if you'll allow me to say so."

She allowed him to say so, laughing at his way of putting it, before the producer and others came in with a tiny figure with the smallest hands and feet on any full-grown man and a large-sized head for his little body. He had his hands in his pockets and whistled to hide his incurable shyness.

"It was g-r-r-r-and, lassie," he said. "Just as I imagined the wean."

Many letters and telegrams were waiting for her in the theatre next day when she passed through the stage-door and she read them in her dressing-room. They were congratulations from unknown admirers and many friends thanking her for the delight she had given them and for some message that had come from her, by her sweetness and grace. "The world is better for your beauty," wrote a famous old dramatist. "My blear old eyes were brightened by your loveliness and I repented of my sins and thanked God for your grace."

Rose Jaffrey had wet eyelashes when she read some of these words. She had been so near to calamity! If she had not been helped like that by some spiritual aid —surely her cry had been heard!—she would have been ruined for ever as an actress. How disappointed all these friends would have been! What a death blow to her father's pride! She had been saved by that cry to her lover, beyond any doubt.

She opened another of those letters. But this time she sat staring at it as though its words had frightened her. It was not a letter of congratulation but a message from Emery Jago.

Dear Miss Jaffrey (he wrote),

I think I ought to tell you that Mr. Mallard has come back. Several times his spirit has spoken through me. He keeps asking for you. If you care to attend one of my séances I feel sure you would be much interested. He has also spoken through Mrs. Laveray who is a medium in Camberwell.

Sincerely yours,
Emery Jago.

Rose Jaffrey hid the letter under some flowers on her dressing-table before answering her call for the first act. One of the actors noticed that her hands were very cold when she touched his own, but she played her part with the same charm.

II

Emery Jago had to write three times before Rose Jaffrey came to one of his séances, but he knew she would come. It was, he felt, written in the book of fate that his life should be linked very closely with that lady whose hair had the sheen of bronze. Ever since Mrs. Laveray had seen such a woman in the crystal he had been looking for her—especially when Belle had seen her too—and he was almost certain of her that first night when she had come to his rooms with Mallard and Professor Boyd and that good-looking youth they called Billy. Afterwards in the country at Mallard's house he had been utterly convinced that she was the lady of the crystal. He could hardly keep his eyes off her when he was in her presence, and he was aware that she noticed it and avoided his gaze nervously. Those eyes of his had that effect on women as he had long known. It was the power that came out of them—that psychical force which had first convinced him of something mysterious in his own nature. He had been jealous, rather absurdly, of Adrian Mallard, seeing instantly that Miss Jaffrey was in love with the man. He would have known that without the newspaper paragraph which had suggested a love affair between them. And during the week in the country before Mallard's death he had been puzzled about this. Some day or other—it was certain—he was to be her lover. Mallard might think that he had first claim upon her but one couldn't get away from clairvoyance, he was sure of that, and it was he, Emery Jago, who had been seen with her in the future.

She attracted him—almost painfully. Her beauty haunted him so that he dreamed of her at night. He was a lover of beauty and very sensitive to its charm, but

there was something about Miss Jaffrey's type which thrilled him with exquisite pleasure. She was a lady, of course; that was partly the reason. He contrasted her wonderful manners, her grace and distinction with poor little Belle's cheap prettiness and common ways He was fond of Belle in a way. She was very loyal and obedient, in spite of her tempers and sudden outbursts of revolt when he had to bully her a little, poor kid. She was his "squaw," as he called her sometimes, remembering Red Indian stories and that spirit of Black Eagle whose voice he sometimes used. She loved him in her funny way, so much that he had to forgive her when she talked nonsense about this medium business in which he was so up to the neck now that there was no escape. But compared with Miss Jaffrey, Belle was just a little drab, and he was not going to let her stand in the way of Destiny. It wouldn't be any good if he tried to. Things were written.

Besides, during that country visit he had fallen in love for the first time in his life—so he felt. It was a romantic love which he had never known before—a kind of worship which made him wish that he hadn't got to play so many tricks and mix them up with his honest belief in the spirit world and psychic mysteries. Miss Jaffrey's loveliness—she was like one of those princesses he used to read about as a boy in tales of chivalry—appealed to the poet in him so that he wrote some verses about her—rather good, too—which he didn't show to Belle because of her scornfulness. He didn't tell her half the things that went on in his mind now because of her sarcasm.

After Mallard's death, which was a great blow to both of them, he had a frightful row in the train with her on the way back to Brixton because she vowed that she wouldn't do anything more with the trumpet. She called him every name she could think of—and she could think of a good many—because he had faked that spirit photo of Ivo and put up that story about Mallard and his wife which they had heard from the old woman at the cottage. Silly of her to make so much of that professional stuff! It hadn't prevented her from seeing Mallard in the crystal, as he told her.

It was her sulking and the sight of the photographer's shop again and the old familiar squalor of their life which had made him get drunk again one night. Any man would be tempted to take to drink when Belle's tongue was nagging at him. But he was sorry now that he had knocked her about that night, in a blind passion. He would have to watch himself about that sort of thing.

On the morning when Miss Jaffrey's answer came to his letters he had another quarrel with Belle. She flamed out directly he passed the note over to her and said, "Miss Jaffrey's coming."

"Then I'm going," said Belle.

He could see that she was preparing for one of her tantrums because of the pinched look about her nostrils and the sulky line between her eyebrows.

"Going where?" he asked coldly.

"Any old where," she answered sharply. "I'll walk the streets rather than stay here and go on with this dirty cheating. And if Miss Jaffrey sets foot in this house I'll march out of it, so there! I've warned you, Em."

It was at breakfast time and he thrust the skin and bones of his kipper into the kitchen fire before arguing with her.

"What's your grudge against Miss Jaffrey?" he asked.

"I've no grudge against her," said Belle suddenly. "I think she's far too good for *you*, Em, and I tell you straight. See?"

He lit his first cigarette of the day and swallowed a mouthful of smoke.

"Jealous again?" he asked with a sarcastic smile.

"Yes!" she snapped. "And I've a right to be. And in any case I'm not going to let Miss Jaffrey come here and be fed up with a lot of lies about Mr. Mallard. You pretend he's come back. You want to kid even me into believing that you hear his voice speaking through you. As if I didn't know the whole game from A to Z and hadn't made a liar of myself to please you! The stuff you make me speak through that tin trumpet makes me sick sometimes. It makes me cry my eyes

out at night when you're sleeping like a log. Now you're making up a tale about Mr. Mallard's return. I won't stand for it, Em. Not if I die for it I won't."

Emery Jago pushed his coffee cup away from him and tilted back his chair. A lock of his dark hair fell over his forehead and his pale face flushed with anger.

"Now, look here," he said. "It's too early in the morning to start an argument. My nerves won't allow of it without losing my temper. But I just want to tell you this. It's not a fake about Mr. Mallard. He's haunting me ever since he died like that. I hear him saying things. I saw his face in the dark the other night. You can believe it or not."

"Liar!" said Belle scornfully. "I suppose you mean to say you heard Ivo's voice speaking to you when you got all you wanted about him from Lady Ardington and that book by Mr. Mallard?"

"I'll leave Ivo out," said Emery, "though I'm not quite sure even about that. That boy got hold of my imagination all right. He seemed to come to me sometimes. You said yourself you didn't know how the ideas came into your head when you were speaking through the trumpet. I don't mind telling you they came from *me!* I dictated them to you and I believe I got them by psychic sensibilities."

"Stow it!" said Belle harshly. "For God's sake, Em, be honest with yourself! You're a faker and a cheat, and I'm your accomplice as they call it, because I'd go to hell for you. And that's that, so there."

Emery Jago shook his head.

"That's just where you're wrong, Belle. That isn't that. These things are all mixed up, as I've told you a thousand times, and as you know yourself. It's you that aren't honest. Don't you believe in that crystal!"

She turned her eyes away from him and spoke bitterly.

"Damn the crystal! I wish I'd never set eyes on it."

"Don't you believe in the crystal?" he asked sternly. "Haven't you seen things in it?"

"Vile things, sometimes," she answered in a low voice. "Things that make me frightened of myself."

He laughed as though her answer had satisfied him.

"There you are then! If you admit that you admit everything."

"I don't admit anything, Em," she cried with shrill passion.

His voice was cold again and insistent.

"Yes, you do, Belle. You admit you see things in the crystal. You saw Mr. Mallard's death."

"It was a coincidence," said Belle. "I'd been thinking of him because of his kindness. I told you so."

"And I didn't believe it," said Emery. "And *you* didn't believe it! It was a clear case of clairvoyance, and if that's true other things are true."

"All your faking, Em? Your spirit photos and all that, and those wax gloves you left lying about the bathroom with a frightful stink of paraffin? Elsie's hands, you said they were, and tried to get me scared."

He was silent about that. It was just an experiment and it didn't prove that spirit hands weren't materialized sometimes. He had said they were Elsie's hands to keep her quiet.

"As if I didn't know!" she went on scornfully. "I've eyes at the back of my head, Em. It's no good trying to kid me. What about those double slates on which you do your spirit writing? And the way you play spirit music with that pair of 'lazy tongs' which you hook on to those guitars and things you picked up in the Caledonian Road? I suppose you call that honest?"

Her eyes challenged him cruelly so that he looked away from her sullenly. He had had no idea that she had found out about the "lazy tongs." That was a tip he had picked up from one of the other mediums with whom he exchanged notes and private information about clients. It was a pair of pincers only three inches long when they were folded up but three feet long when they were fully opened out, and very useful for picking up things in the dark and jangling musical instruments at a distance from him.

"I do a bit of faking," he said. "What medium doesn't? It's a business like everything else, and one has to do it with a sense of humour. But I swear to goodness I've been in touch with Mallard. I saw his

face in the dark the other night as clearly as I see you now in broad daylight."

"You were drunk," said Belle. "You'd been round to the 'Bells' again. You're always going there now."

"I hadn't touched a drop," he vowed. "I went into the room upstairs and was just going to switch on the light when I saw Mr. Mallard, smiling, just as he looked that afternoon before his death. Perfectly distinct like a face seen by flashlight. And the other night when Lady Ardington came with her party I heard Mallard's voice, inside my brain, but quite audible. He said, 'Tell Miss Jaffrey to come.' I'm certain of it."

Belle Chubb was clearing off the breakfast things noisily as she always did when she was in a temper. She seized the teapot and stood holding it against her side and laughed with a shrill anger.

"You're a priceless liar, Em! You really are! And what's worse, you lie to yourself so that you don't know *what's* the truth. You'll go balmy one of these days. I'll have to visit you when you've got straws in your hair."

He was silent for a few minutes while she went into the scullery and began washing up. He was very angry with her again. If he had taken any drink he would have wanted to hit her. Even now after breakfast when he was perfectly sober he had a hard time to control his temper and his nerves. If there was one thing he couldn't stand it was Belle's nagging and disbelief in his psychic powers.

Presently she came out of the scullery as he still sat at the table with his chair tilted, and put her hands on his shoulders, and laid her cheek against his unshaven face.

"You know I love you, Em!" she said, coaxingly. "You make me feel like a slut sometimes, but I can't help loving you. So there!"

"It's a funny way of showing love," he said, sulkily.

Then he shrugged his shoulders and went toward the shop where he was still carrying on his business as a photographer, though now he was making much more money as a medium, thanks to Lady Ardington and all the friends she sent.

"Anyhow," he said, "don't forget Miss Jaffrey is coming this afternoon."

Belle glanced at him sideways and her pale face flushed again.

"That's all right, Em. I'm going to the movies. You can make love to her for all I care. She and her bronze coloured hair!"

She was jealous of every woman who came to the house. And he had been foolish to call Miss Jaffrey "the lady of the crystal." That was what had upset her so much.

III

Rose Jaffrey resisted Emery Jago's invitation until that third letter came. There seemed to her something rather shameful and almost evil in going to that medium to get into touch with her dear egoist. She had disliked that man Jago, from the very first, because of something unhealthy about him and the way he stared at her with his luminous eyes in which once or twice she saw an amorous look. Once in the country his hand had touched hers—when she was looking at that spirit photograph of Ivo—and it had given her an unpleasant sensation, as though she had touched a toad, because his small hand, like a woman's, was so cold and clammy. She had suspected him of being a fraud, although Adrian had been so impressed, until she had been startled by that voice through the trumpet—Adrian recognized Ivo's voice—which had said things about Evelyn and Freddy Duke in Egypt before the extraordinary appearance of that Egyptian god on the table. Even then she would have doubted it all if it had not been for the girl's vision in the crystal. It had come terribly true and she could no longer doubt that these queer mediums possessed secret powers beyond the ordinary range of human senses.

Then she had been startled by that experience in the theatre—in her dressing-room—when she had forgotten her part and cried out to Mallard for help. She had been answered instantly. All her nervousness had left her. She had been intensely aware of some spiritual rescue at the moment of her greatest distress. Not one word to her father or any friend had she said about that, but in her heart she could not help believing that her lover had come back across the bridge that night to

give her courage. Yet she was afraid of going to Emery Jago. She had a feeling of spiritual danger, as though something inside herself warned her against it, as a step toward some evil thing.

In the third letter from him was a newspaper cutting which broke down her resistance. It was an article from a spiritualistic paper published in Clerkenwell, and was headed "Return of noted K.C." Between the acts of her play she read its small print with anguish and emotion.

It will interest our readers to hear that the late Mr. Adrian Mallard, the famous King's Counsel who lately passed over, has reappeared at several séances in the rooms of that well-known medium Mr. Emery Jago, photographer, of Ezra Road, Brixton. From what we hear the eminent lawyer has had interesting meetings with many former criminals whom he defended during their earthly adventures, including the notorious murderer, Lee Chaggle, who cut his wife into pieces when he was temporarily possessed by the spirit of Henry VIII. Mr. Adrian Mallard has been initiated into his new sphere by his brother Ivo who was killed on the Somme during the great war. It appears that they play tennis together with luminous balls. Our gallant youth who passed over during time of war enjoy many of their old sports. This is very encouraging to those of us who believe in the spiritual value of games and cannot envisage another life without some form of physical recreation. It appears that Mr. Adrian Mallard, K.C., still takes an interest in the drama here on earth and that his spirit visits the Lyric Theatre where Miss Rose Jaffrey is playing the chief part in Barrie's latest play. This charming actress, we understand, was one of his *protégées*.

She showed the newspaper cutting to her father, who was staying with her in town, and watched him while he read it through his pince-nez, and noticed that his hand trembled as he held the slip of paper.

"Father," she said, "can it be true? What shall I do about it?"

"I think it's true," he said. "'There are more things in heaven and earth——'"

"It fills me with dread," she told him. "I feel very frightened, Father. Of course, if it's true I must go to him."

"To Jago?" he asked doubtfully.

"To Adrian," she answered. "He keeps asking for me."

They went together to that photographer's shop in

Brixton, and Mr. Jaffrey blamed himself afterwards for the results of that visit and others, upon his daughter's mind. Things had gone too far when he realized that she was becoming ill and nerve-wracked by these adventures in spiritualism and that her work was suffering to such an extent that her manager was becoming alarmed for her reputation. Nor did he know until too late that she went alone many times to Jago's house in Brixton in order to keep in touch with the spirit of Mallard, as she now firmly believed.

At that first visit Emery Jago told her how he had seen the face of Mr. Mallard, blindingly clear, when he had walked into the darkness of that upstairs room one night, and how he had heard Mr. Mallard's voice, perfectly distinct, at a séance he had given in the presence of Lady Ardington and her friends. Later he had tried to get into touch with him by going into the silence, and almost instantly Mr. Mallard had come through as bright and cheery as that afternoon when he had played tennis with Wilfred Neal. He had spoken through the luminous trumpet, saying many interesting things about his meetings with Ivo and the pleasant life he led on the other side where things were not nearly so different as people imagined, and where, indeed, this earthly life of ours is continued in an etherealized and sublimated form.

At that first sitting alone with Mr. Jaffrey and Rose —the girl seemed to have gone out—he tried the luminous trumpet, but it failed. Then he suggested trying to get a message through by means of a wine-glass and the alphabet arranged in a circle, just as Mallard and Rose had done it under the direction of Professor Boyd. It worked very rapidly after Mr. Jaffrey and Rose and Jago himself had touched the top of the wine glass with the tips of their fingers. She shivered slightly and irresistibly when for the first time she felt Jago's fingers touching hers. They had that cold touch which she had noticed before and disliked so much, and always his dark eyes sought out hers as though he were staring into her mind.

"It moves!" said Mr. Jaffrey. "It is spelling out something."

It spelled out the words "I am here," and when Mr. Jaffrey asked, "Who is there?" it answered, "Mallard."

For a moment Rose felt very faint and Jago noticed that and stopped the experiment to bring her some water. When they resumed the glass spelled out a number of sentences rapidly and Mr. Jaffrey wrote them down in a book, from which they may now be copied.

"I am very happy here . . . Ivo is just the same . . . youthful and gay . . . I'm still earthbound because of my love of life. . . . That fellow Jago is my link with the world. . . . Do you remember him? He came down with the little white-faced girl. . . . Sometimes I stand by your side. . . . I go to the Lyric Theatre. . . . That is a charming play of Barrie's. . . . You are wonderful, my dear. . . . I write to you every day but you do not seem to get my letters. . . . I must try some other plan. . . . Jago will help. . . . He has unusual gifts. . . . Sensitive. Don't trust any other mediums. . . . They're all rotters. . . . The force is giving out now. . . . Ivo is calling. . . ."

"Wonderful!" said Mr. Jaffrey.

Rose said nothing. She felt terror-stricken and sick. How could she tell whether these words were coming from her lover's mind? What proof was there? She doubted them and yet was ashamed to doubt. Perhaps they were true. Perhaps Mallard was speaking to her and she would be wicked if she turned a deaf ear to his dear soul.

Emery Jago was speaking in his soft voice.

"It's curious about those letters! He wants to try some other plan. Let us see what we can do with spirit-writing."

He went through the velvet curtains and was away for a moment or two.

"Father!" said Rose. "Is this true?"

She clasped one of his hands and he felt that it was burning as though she were feverish.

"It seems true to me," he said. "I don't doubt it personally. The partition is very thin between this world and the next."

Jago came back with a sort of slate, or writing tablet, framed in wood, with a little sponge tied to it with a bit of string.

"Let's see if we can get him to write something," he suggested. "I've known it happen. It's best to write down a question and then wait for the answer. Sometimes it's a long time coming, and we have to keep silent and obscure the light."

He handed the slate to Rose and asked her to write something—some question.

She turned to her father with a look of distress.

"Father! Do you think I ought to?"

"There can't be any harm in it, my dear."

She wrote a question. It was like the one that Adrian Mallard had asked when he wanted proof of Ivo's identity. It was the question which almost all people ask when they demand proof of psychic phenomena.

"Will you say something that is secret between us?"

Emery Jago did not appear to read the words. He took the slate from her and turned it over carelessly.

"You see it is clean on this side," he remarked. "We will sponge it again to make sure."

He rubbed the slate with a damp sponge and held it up to Mr. Jaffrey. There was nothing written there.

"Now we must wait," said Emery. "If the spirit of Mr. Mallard is with us he may like this plan of writing letters. I will put the pencil here, before I turn down the light."

They sat in darkness for fifteen minutes. Rose shivered once from a draught that came through the window. She reproached herself again for coming to this place. She detested that man Jago, and his quiet stealthy ways, and his queer watching eyes. There was something sinister about him—repulsive. And yet those words spelled out by the wine glass had almost convinced her that they came from Adrian. Certainly they had not come from her own subconsciousness. She had hardly touched the glass with her finger-tips. Perhaps this medium had moved the glass just where he wanted. Perhaps it was all a trick. But he had

hardly glanced at the letters and the glass had seemed to slip about without any control by him. He might be a human instrument highly sensitive to some spiritual vibrations. That was his own explanation and the theory of all these mysterious things. She would be cowardly if she dared not face the possibility of truth. What would Adrian think of her if she refused this means of communication? Surely if she were certain of it nothing else would matter in life. Always to be in touch with Adrian—to hear him speak to her, to answer back! The black curtain of death would be drawn aside. . . .

In the darkness there was a little squeaking noise. It was as though a pencil were writing on that slate which Emery Jago had put on the table. He was sitting at least a yard away and she could see his figure, motionless.

"A spirit is writing," he said in a low voice.

That squeaky sound stopped and after a moment's silence Emery rose from his chair and switched on the light.

"Something is written!" he said, going toward the slate.

"Astounding!" said Mr. Jaffrey in his solemn and sepulchral voice.

Rose could not rise to look at the slate. She sat still in her chair, gripping its arms. All her strength seemed drained out of her and she felt bloodless. What was written there? She dared not ask.

"My dear," said Mr. Jaffrey, "this is remarkable. It's in Mallard's writing."

"A strange sentence!" said Jago.

He held up the slate slantwise so that the light fell on it, and read out some words.

"Love has no death and spirits meet across the bridge.
"ADRIAN MALLARD."

"Do you remember?" asked Mr. Jaffrey. "It was the sentence spelled out by that wine glass when Boyd was making his experiments. Mallard was very much startled at the time."

"I wasn't there," said Jago.

"No," answered Mr. Jaffrey. "It was before you came down. We were alone together in that old house of ours. Rose and I and our friends."

"Is it like Mr. Mallard's signature?" asked Jago.

"It *is* his signature," said Mr. Jaffrey. "Not a doubt about it. That final flourish. What do you think, Rose?"

Rose stared at it. Yes, it was in Adrian's handwriting. She had all his dear letters to her and in every one of them was that big signature, so bold and self-assertive, with that final stroke sweeping under it. . . . Those words above! They were the words that he had repeated to her several times after that evening when they had been first spelled out. On the afternoon of his death he had told her that they expressed the faith that was in him. This medium, Emery Jago, knew nothing of them. It was the secret watchword between herself and Adrian. She had promised to meet him across the bridge. That sentence held their eternal pledge.

IV

She had no doubt after that. It was beyond all doubt. Boyd's explanation which he had made to her father did not shake her belief. He suggested that the medium had made use of the letter which Mallard had written to him inviting him down into the country and had copied the handwriting and signature. But it had appeared upon the slate when he was a yard away from the table and she had heard the pencil scraping. And how could Boyd account for the medium's knowledge of those words? No one knew them except four living people.

"Your father may have mentioned them," said Boyd. "They stuck in his mind and he may have repeated them to Jago when they were alone together that afternoon developing those photographs."

"He says he didn't," said Rose.

"He *thinks* he didn't!" argued Boyd. "But you know your father's chatty ways."

Rose shook her head.

"It was Adrian who wrote on that slate," she said. "It was his writing. No one could copy it like that or in that way without any contact. Emery Jago was sitting far away from the table when the pencil began to write."

"It was all written before—ready for you," said Boyd.

"The slate was clean," she told him. "There was nothing written there."

Boyd looked at her anxiously. He had admired her for her laughing scepticism when Mallard had been taken with this stuff. Now the laughter and the scepticism had passed from her. She was taking it too seriously.

She believed it all and nothing that he could say would shake her. And as an honest man he could not say too much. As a psychologist and an inquirer into the supernormal mind—he had been reading everything he could lay his hands on lately—he had come to the conclusion that there was some very plausible evidence for mysterious phenomena beyond the range of known laws. He could not say truthfully that the whole thing was humbug and illusion. He could only say that that fellow Jago filled him with the darkest suspicion and that he was convinced, without evidence, of his fraudulent character—or at least of fraudulent practices which might be mixed up with hypersensitive cognition.

"If I were you, Miss Jaffrey," he said carelessly, "I would give that fellow a long miss. This sort of thing—true or false—is very harmful. Frightfully dangerous! Promise me—for Mallard's sake—you won't go near him again!"

"I must go," she answered, "for Adrian's sake. When he asks for me how can I refuse to go?"

"My dear," said Boyd very gravely. "I beg of you not to. I have been speaking to your father about it. He agrees that it's getting on your nerves. It's interfering with your work. And after all, that comes first."

"Adrian comes first," she answered, "now and always."

Boyd was very much concerned. The best thing he could think of was to go with her to those séances, but each time he went Jago complained that the conditions were bad and that there was a hostile influence present which was checking his communications. Only once did anything happen and that was some spirit-writing on the slate exactly as Rose had described it and in Mallard's script. Boyd could not see the trick of it, though he was certain that Jago was forging Mallard's signature and imitating his style. Some of the letters were not formed like Mallard's. They were not joined together in the same way, as far as he could remember, though Rose found no fault with them. For some time he suspected that she did not tell him she was going alone to Jago's, and afterwards when he questioned her she confessed that she had been several times—after

her Wednesday matinées—without even letting her father know. It was having an effect on her physical health. She looked pale and washed out. There were dark lines under her eyes. She was not quite so beautiful.

Worse still, that man Jago was beginning to bother her at the theatre. It was Billy who found that out one night when he took some flowers round to her dressing-room before the play. The doorkeeper knew him and let him pass, and he tapped at the door and heard her answer. But when he went in he was shocked to see how white she looked before she had made up for her part. She was seated at her dressing-table with some sheets of paper before her on which she had been writing, and she thrust them on one side hurriedly when he came in, in a kind of guilty way which made him feel uncomfortable. But she smiled at his image in the looking-glass and pretended to be busy with her make-up.

"Hullo, Billy dear! I thought it was my dresser. . . . What lovely flowers—and how sweet of you!"

She took the flowers—they were red roses—and put her face into them.

"I'm longing for country life again," she told him. "As soon as this play is over—somewhere about Christmas, I believe—I shall slip down to Surrey and spend a quiet time in a quiet house."

She meant Mallard's house and she invited Neal to join her there with Boyd and her father.

He sat chatting in her room while she put on her make-up, hiding her whiteness under that grease paint.

"What about a little supper afterwards?" he asked. "We might do a dance together, if it wouldn't bore you."

"It wouldn't bore me," she said, smiling at him through the mirror while she darkened her eyebrows. "It's always a pleasure to dance with you, Billy! But unfortunately I'm engaged."

"For the third time of asking!" he exclaimed dolefully. "Who's your friend, may I ask? If it's old Boyd I shall feel like hitting him."

"It's not old Boyd," she told him, but she didn't say who it was, and he had a sudden pang of jealousy, wondering whether she had become friends with someone

else outside his circle. Of course he hadn't the slightest right to be jealous.

Then there was a tap at the door and her dresser—a plain-faced woman whom young Neal had often seen—came in with a note.

"It's from that young fellow named Jago, dearie. He's waiting for an answer."

Jago! Young Neal remembered the name. It was that infernal medium whom he had seen one night in Brixton and afterwards at Mallard's house.

He noticed that Rose seemed distressed and that her hands trembled as she opened the letter and read it.

"Tell him that I will meet him outside the stage door after the play. When the car has come round."

"Very well, dearie."

The woman slipped out and Rose went on with her make-up.

Young Neal was silent for a moment and then blurted out the thought that was nagging in his mind.

"Rose! I don't want to butt in, and all that, but if that infernal medium fellow is plaguing you at all I'll go out and break his jaw for him. What the devil does he want round here?"

"That's all right, Billy," she said quietly. "I want to see him. He has a—message—for me."

Neal had heard something from Boyd about the way she was taken up with those séances, and he hated the whole idea of it with a really passionate loathing. Now something seemed to stifle him and he was startled by his own emotion when he tried to repress.

"Rose!" he said. "I hope to goodness you're not getting into that fellow's clutches. I don't know much about that sort of thing but I know enough to be certain that it's all wrong. Horrible and revolting! Of course it's cheek of me, I know, but if I were you I wouldn't touch that sort of thing with the end of a barge pole. There's something devilish about it. It's like sinning against the Holy Ghost."

She was silent for a few moments after that outburst. Then she came up to him from her dressing-table and put her hand on his arm.

"Billy, what am I to do?" she asked tremulously.

"Adrian keeps speaking to me through that man Jago. It frightens me, but I must go on with it. How can I refuse to keep in touch with him?—Adrian, I mean. You see all that writing on the table? It's automatic writing. The pencil moves without my will power. It's Adrian who writes. Love letters which tear at my heart. He asked Jago to tell me how to do it. He has promised Jago to appear to me, materialized, so that I shall see him as he was in life. He wants to touch my hair again and put his hands about me. . . . Billy, it frightens me, but what am I to do?"

She had her hand on his arm, clutching him. There was a frightened look in her eyes, and her lips were white beneath their rouge.

"Great God!" said young Neal. He repeated the words "Great God!" again with a horror in his voice.

Then he took her hands and held them tightly.

"Rose, for heaven's sake, don't go in for this sort of thing! I don't believe a word of it. It's all a fraud and a sham. Even if it were true it would be frightful. God doesn't want the dead to come back. It's not—decent. If Mallard has gone to Heaven, and I'm certain he has, he doesn't want to put his arms about you and touch your hair. That's animal. It has nothing to do with the spirit. Don't you see what I mean? If we're immortal—and that's what I believe—surely we can wait a few years before we get together again? All this spiritualism is blasphemy and beastliness. It's cutting out God. It's devilish and filthy."

She suddenly shook as he held her hands—shook like a shell-shocked man, hysterical and tortured.

"Oh, Billy!" she cried. "Oh, Billy!"

He drew her toward him and held her tight.

"Hush!" he whispered. "Hush! For God's sake. My dear. Please! Please!"

It was the first time he had held her in his arms, as he had longed to do, loving her beauty, but there was no touch of passion in him as he held her then—only pity and alarm.

There was a tap on the door and a moment later it opened a few inches and a voice said "Quarter of an hour, please," before the door was closed again.

"I must get ready," said Rose.

She drew herself out of his arms and stood for a moment with her fingers pressed against her forehead in a dazed way.

"Promise me you won't see that fellow Jago again?" said Billy. "Promise, Rose!"

She shook her head.

"Adrian keeps talking through him. I must go. I must."

"I won't let you," he told her fiercely. "I'll see that you don't. I'll bash that dirty swine——"

"Leave me, Billy," she said. "Please. I must pull myself together. This awful play——"

He had to go, for pity's sake, and outside the stage door he saw Emery Jago who was standing there under a lamp post. He was not so shabby as when young Neal had last seen him and he had had his hair cut. Curiously, by some trick of light, he had some look of Mallard about him. It was the poise of his head, and the way he stood, in a waisted overcoat like Mallard had worn with a silver-knobbed stick.

For a moment young Neal was tempted to smash his face and knock him senseless on the pavement there. Their eyes met, and perhaps Emery Jago saw a dangerous gleam in young Neal's eyes, for he started back and turned down a side alley where a policeman was standing.

"Next time, perhaps," thought young Neal, who had forgotten his hat in Rose's dressing-room and walked bareheaded into Piccadilly, with a white face and tortured eyes which made people turn to look at him.

V

To Rose Jaffrey, poor dear, as once she told young Neal, those visits to Emery Jago were like drug-taking or some secret vice. They were against all her traditions and instincts as a normal English girl, fastidious of the company she kept and healthy-minded. She knew there was something morbid and demoralizing in this state of mind into which she had fallen—a kind of trance-like state making life around her seem quite unreal and eliminating all other interests and desires, except the desperate yearning to receive those spirit messages from Mallard and to talk to him through the medium who was the human link between them.

Many times she resolved to abandon her visits to Brixton and that photographer's shop which had become her spiritual home. She prayed for strength to stop going there but her will power and her faith in prayer were both weak. She cried out to Mallard in her dressing-room at the theatre and even while she was playing her part of the smiling lady, though no one in her audience heard those silent cries.

"Oh, my dear, do not ask me to go to that dreadful place again! . . . Be patient and wait for me until I come to meet you . . . Life is very short down here."

But all the time Jago was getting new messages telling her that Mallard wished her to come, that he had other things to say, and that his contact with her kept him happy on the other side.

Her nerves had gone to pieces and she felt ill, hardly able to struggle through that part when she had to smile and smile. She wrote messages to Jago saying "I cannot come to-day," but she tore them up while the messenger waited for them, and changed her mind, or

rather yielded to some power stronger than her will. Once she actually sent such a message, but half-way through the second act she felt an irresistible impulse driving her to Brixton, so that she was desperate for the matinée to end and could hardly wait to take off her make-up and change her clothes before sending word round to her chauffeur. Generally she took a taxi, so that her chauffeur should not gossip about those frequent visits to the corner of Ezra Road, and it was in a taxi that she drove to Emery Jago late one night after the theatre when she had excused herself again from having a supper dance with Billy.

She was sorry about Billy. She had seen for a long time that he was in love with her, poor boy, though he had never said a word about it. Only his eyes told her and a chivalrous devotion which she found very sweet and charming. Sometimes when her headache was very bad she asked him to take her out for a drive in his car and then regretted asking him because of his boyish delight. It was hardly fair to let him think that she might get to love him one day when the shock of Adrian's death had passed.

She was too shy to tell him that she was pledged eternally to Mallard and that she could have no earthly lover. One day she would have to tell him, and hurt him horribly, she knew. Meanwhile it was good to have him as knight-errant, always eager to do any little service for her, never asking anything for himself. She felt safe with him. She envied him as Mallard had done, for his religious convictions, his simplicity of mind, his instinctive obedience to some code which kept him straight and clean. She could not quarrel with him for his horror of spiritualism and of Emery Jago. She had a horror of Jago herself. She was afraid of that man. Sometimes she felt that he had a power over her, some hypnotic power which drained her of strength and made her weak under his will. It was those eyes of his which stared into hers, horribly. She was almost sure that she had a physical attraction for him and that he arranged things so their hands touched, or so that he sat very close to her. Sometimes he smiled at her in a queer disconcerting way which made her feel

uncomfortable and anxious to get away from him, out of that darkened room above his shop, into the fresh air. . . .

And yet he was the link between her and Mallard, the human telephone between two worlds. There was no doubt in her mind that he had these psychic powers, and that the spirit of her lover spoke through him. Over and over again the messages that came through revealed the character of her lover as she had known him, still her dear egoist, still interested in his own personality, still vital and emotional and devoted to beauty. He described the flowers in the other world, and the wonderful scents there, and the ceaseless play of light and colour. He talked a lot about Ivo and the boys who had been killed in the war. He was deeply interested still in Billy and his career and hoped he would marry some nice girl. . . .

But lately he had been hinting at something which she could hardly understand, something very mysterious and frightening. It was about her own marriage with him. He was preparing, he said, for their spiritual marriage which would consummate his happiness. It was hard luck, he said, that he had been cut off from her before that joy would come to them, the joy of perfect union of body and soul which he had desired with all his heart. In the spiritual world that was no longer possible, but now he was able to cross the bridge he would come to her in his marriage garment. She would be his earthly bride and Ivo would be their best man.

These words had come, in one form or another, and in several different ways : by spirit-writing on the slate, through the luminous trumpet, and spelled out by the wine glass. At first she had thought that he was speaking to her in a symbolical way, referring to that pledge they had made, their eternal love. But gradually she was startled into the belief that they meant more than that, and that he was insisting upon a marriage which was to be worldly as well as spiritual. He spoke of the little church near his country house and hoped she would invite all his old friends. He hoped especially that Boyd would be there and made some joke about seeing that he bought a new top hat.

It was on that night when she had driven to Brixton after the theatre, keeping the taxi standing at the corner of Ezra Road, that the messages about that "marriage" came through most clearly. She sat opposite Emery Jago at the little table he used for the wine glass and the alphabet. Their finger-tips touched on top of the wine glass which moved very rapidly from letter to letter. Emery Jago's face was as white as hers in that dimly lighted room. He seemed surprised and startled by the words that were spelled out, and stared at her now and then with strained attention, watching her face. Downstairs, Belle was playing the gramophone—strident dance music and negro songs which came faintly up to the top room. She never took part in these séances and seemed to avoid meeting Rose who was surprised sometimes by her shy and almost hostile look. The trams in the Brixton Road made a dull, distant clangour. Now and then the honking of taxi horns trumpeted into the silence of this upstairs room.

"It's odd about that marriage," said Emery, in a low voice. "He keeps referring to it. Every message now."

Rose took the tips of her fingers off the glass.

"I don't understand it," she whispered faintly. "It frightens me."

"Oh, I wouldn't get scared," said Emery, smiling at her. "Mr. Mallard knows best. If we can get at his meaning. . . . Let's ask him to explain more clearly."

They tried the glass again but it was utterly dead.

"Queer!" said Emery. "No life in it at all. The power has gone out of it. Perhaps we might get something on the slate."

"I must go," said Rose. "It's very late and my father will be anxious."

"Five minutes more," pleaded Emery. "If nothing happens then I'll walk to your taxi with you. It seems important to know about that marriage, don't you think?"

He stared into her eyes again with his mesmeric gaze.

She wanted to go, but could not. Something held her against her will. She would get no sleep that night, anyhow. She would lie awake wondering about those

messages. This sleeplessness was wearing her nerves out. One day she would break down. She simply couldn't go on like this.

"A direct message would be the best," said Emery. "On the slate. In his writing."

He put the slate on the table and turned the light down so that the room was almost dark.

"Hold my hands," he said.

She took his hands and a light shudder passed through her because of their coldness and his clammy touch. She loathed this medium who was the link between her and Mallard.

They waited like that for several minutes.

"I hear the slate writing," said Emery presently.

Certainly there was a faint sound in the room like the scratching of a pencil but it seemed nearer to them than the table and lower down as though someone were writing on the floor boards.

"Let us see," he said. "What is written is written."

He released her hands and switched up the light. There were some words on the slate which he handed to Rose before reading them himself.

"What is there?" he asked in a strained voice.

She read them and gave a cry.

The words were in Mallard's writing.

You are going to marry Jago. My spirit inhabits his body. It will be our wedding.

Adrian.

She dropped the slate to the floor and gave another whimpering cry and stood swaying, with her hands against her breast.

Emery Jago had stooped down and picked up the slate and read the words, with a very bright light in his eyes.

"It's true," he said. "I've known it all along. I'm inhabited by Mallard."

He came toward her and took her hands.

"I *am* Mallard," he said. "He possesses me. I'm your lover. . . . I'm Mallard. . . . Don't you understand?"

She thrust him back from her, shaking off his hands.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "Don't come near me! I loathe you."

He smiled at her and came close again.

"I'm Mallard," he said again. "You can't keep away from me. Our marriage is written in the Book of Fate. . . . I'm your lover."

She thrust out her hands again to keep him back.

"No. . . . No!"

She put her hands to her throat as though she were choking and then to her face, weeping bitterly.

"Rose!" said Emery. "My beautiful lady. My lady of the crystal. It's all foretold."

He tried to put his arms about her and there was a silly mad look in his eyes and he breathed loudly. Then he became frightened because Rose Jaffrey lay limp in his arms and he could not hold her weight so that he almost fell with her.

"Belle!" he shouted. "Belle!"

The girl came running upstairs at his shout, and stood in the doorway staring at him as he let Rose Jaffrey slip to the floor where she lay on the bare boards.

"What's the meaning of all this?" asked Belle. "What the devil do you mean by it, Em? Mucking about with Miss Jaffrey at all times of the day and night. . . . What's she lying like that for?"

She ran forward and knelt down by Rose and caught hold of her limp hands.

"She's gone clean off, poor thing! . . . You're a devil, Em, that's what you are!"

"Shut your mouth!" he said fiercely. "Go and get some brandy, and look quick about it."

VI

PLAY-GOING people were sorry when they read that Rose Jaffrey had had to abandon her part as the humorous lady in Barrie's play owing to a nervous breakdown from overwork. They echoed the words of a leading article in one of the evening papers which paid a graceful tribute to her art and said, "We trust that this talented young actress will soon enjoy a speedy return to health and delight us again by that charm which has put us all in her debt."

Mr. Jaffrey and her private friends were more alarmed. She had broken down completely on the night following that late visit to Brixton, and her understudy had had to appear in the last act after an annoucement by the manager to a startled house. She was very ill that night and the doctor who was called by her father prescribed a long rest, preferably in the country.

"It's a question of nerves," he said, "and that's the hardest thing of all to tackle. . . . Anything troubling her, Mr. Jaffrey? An unhappy love affair, or anything like that? Forgive my question, but I confess I'm worried."

It was the same young doctor who had been called in one night to attend Mallard when his heart gave a kick. His practice in Knightsbridge went down as far as the lowest end of Sloane Street where the Jaffreys had their flat.

Mr. Jaffrey mentioned a word about a love affair that had been cut short by death, and the doctor nodded, as though he had guessed something of the sort.

"She's brooding, I'm afraid. All the symptoms of neurasthenia. I wouldn't leave her alone much. If you take her down to the country I should get someone

to stay with you. Some nice woman with cheerful ways."

But Rose disliked that idea of a nice woman with cheerful ways.

"I want to be alone, Father. I couldn't bear to have a chatty person in the house. Perhaps Billy will come down for week-ends now and then. And Professor Boyd."

So it was arranged and she seemed much better when she got away from London, although Mr. Jaffrey was afraid that Mallard's house, which was now hers and into which he had moved his books and treasures, might remind her too much of that dear friend of hers—her lover, as she called him candidly, not hiding that secret from her father.

And yet she was hiding something, he was almost sure. It occurred to him, just once or twice, that she had been greatly upset by those visits to that medium fellow, though personally—believing in the spirit world—he thought they should have given her strength and comfort. But women were nervous about that kind of thing. He blamed himself for having encouraged it but he had no idea that she had been going to séances without his knowledge, stealing away from the theatre after her matinées for those secret visits. He had believed that she had lost interest in spiritualism, especially as he had mentioned Jago's name now and then and she had expressed a dislike for him and had begged her father not to talk about the man.

He wondered if, perhaps, she had some other lover. He had never pried at all into her private life since she had earned her own living as an actress. She had her own friends. He had known nothing even of Mallard—except an occasional reference she had made to his kindness—until the day she had brought him into the little old house at the bottom of the lane, and said, "Father, here is Mr. Mallard."

It was just possible that she was being worried by some good-looking scoundrel—one of those fellows who hang round stage doors. He noticed that almost every morning she received a letter, among many others, which she put on one side hurriedly, and almost furtively, he

thought. He hated to watch her like that but he could not help noticing it. Almost every morning there was this mysterious letter which caused her such distress that she went pale at the sight of it—and would not open it before him.

He summoned up courage to speak to her about it one evening. She was sitting by the fireplace in the library under the portrait of Mallard by Orpen and he was on the other side, in a deep chair, smoking a pipe and reading a manuscript play that had been sent to him by one of Neal's friends—modern and audacious stuff which kept him interested and annoyed. Suddenly he heard Rose give a little whimper, and looking up he saw that she was weeping.

"My dear!" he said tenderly. "Tell your old father. How can I help?"

He crossed the fireplace and kissed her on the forehead, and she caught hold of his hand and kept it in a tight clasp for a moment or two.

"It's all right, Father. It's only these silly nerves of mine."

"I know!" he said. "I know! Nerves are the very deuce. But this fresh air down here ought to do you good. And young Neal is coming down for the week-end. He'll cheer us up. A charming boy, that."

"As good as gold," said Rose."

"How cold your hands are, my dear!" he exclaimed. "They're trembling like a fledgling bird in these old paws of mine."

"Father!" she cried. "Hold me tight. I'm afraid."

He held her tight. She was like a child frightened by the dark. Once he remembered her like that, years ago, when she was a baby thing. She had come down in her nightgown, crying, and complained of "beasts" in her room. Nasty big beasts with red eyes who wanted to eat her up.

"My darling!" he said. "Why are you afraid? Tell me. I'm your mother now as well as your father, and always your comrade. There's nothing you can't say to me."

"Best and kindest!" she said, pulling his head down to her wet face.

It was ten minutes later when that trembling fit had passed that he spoke to her quietly about that doubt in his mind.

"Rose," he said, "you and I have talked about almost everything, but I know you keep a few secrets from me. Of course you do, dear heart, and I don't want to pry into any of them! We all have our little hiding places, our sanctuaries. But I'm going to ask one question—not for curiosity's sake but because, if you like to answer it, you may feel better for it. I mean if there's any trouble I can help to smooth out I'll be glad. I'm not quite an old fool yet. I've seen life, and I've been young, and I haven't forgotten the growing-pains of youth. It's all very difficult—youth and life!"

But she turned pale and began to tremble again when he asked his question.

"It's about those letters," he said. "Every morning you get a letter which worries you. Is it from some blackmailing swine? Is it the cause in any way of your ill-health—some persistent lover who is plaguing you?"

"No, Father," she said. "No. Don't ask me. It's nothing like that."

"Good!" he said. "Good!" and left it at that. It was only afterwards that he read those letters from Emery Jago—strange and terrible letters, in which he delivered messages from Adrian Mallard who possessed him, he said. They commanded Rose to make ready for her marriage. In marrying Jago she would be marrying Mallard.

How long will you keep me waiting? (he asked). *I suffer torments because of your refusal. I am hungry for your beauty. I shall have no peace until I stand at the altar with you, my beautiful earth-bride, my English rose, whose fragrance reaches me across the eternal bridge. . . .*

They were letters which Mr. Jaffrey burned until there was nothing left of them but ash, and a hideous remembrance.

VII

Young Neal and Boyd came down for the week-end and Rose seemed happier for their company. They heard her laugh again when she played croquet with them, and one evening they had a foursome at bridge and she and Billy beat Boyd and Mr. Jaffrey handsomely —much to Boyd's annoyance because he fancied himself as a scientific expert, or pretended to, perhaps, just to make Rose rebuke him for his bad temper and recover her vivacity.

To young Neal the house was haunted by the spirit of Mallard who had been his guardian and friend. Every room reminded him of that vital, kind, and generous man whose portrait smiled down from the fireplace in his study, where all his things remained as they had been on that summer afternoon when he had played his last game of tennis. It was difficult to believe that he had gone farther than the next room. And Neal noticed that Rose seemed to feel the same thing. He saw her touch things caressingly that Mallard had once handled —his silver cigarette box, and the book he had been reading in the window seat. Often he saw her lift her head to that portrait over the fireplace, as though answering the smile that made it so living.

Billy was jealous of Mallard and ashamed of the thought. He had only guessed that his guardian had been in love with this girl. At the time it had seemed no more than a middle-aged friendship for her—one of Mallard's enthusiasms for beauty, and his kindness to the younger crowd. Now he suspected that Rose remembered him too well. She was always so eager to talk about him and to listen to yarns about him. It was unfair, he thought, and hated himself for thinking so.

And it was all mixed up with that spook-stuff which had upset her so much and made her ill, that horrible and filthy nonsense which had been put into her mind by the fellow Jago whom he wanted to hurt. He had come down with the determination to speak to her about his love. She must have guessed that she meant everything in life to him. He had hung about the theatre night after night until the staff there had a made a joke of it. He had been her errand boy, although she had called him her knight-errant. She must know that he would give his life for her if that would do her any good.

He had no claim in the world to ask her to love him. In a way that was rot. She was a famous actress and all England was in love with her. But she might find him useful. He could save her from that fellow Jago, who had frightened her. She might feel safe with him, and one day, perhaps, he might persuade her to become a Catholic. That would put an end to all her spiritual worries. It was a peaceful old harbourage, the Catholic Church, whatever people might say about it —some of the modernists like Boyd who thought they knew everything and seemed very worried with their knowledge. Anyhow he was going to get things off his chest as best he could and he hoped she wouldn't jeer at him as she had ever right to do, of course.

It was on a Sunday morning that he found his chance. He had gone off to early church in Guildford and joined Boyd at breakfast. Afterward he strolled around for a bit until he came to the gate over which Mallard had vaulted to his death. He was rather sorry his meanderings had led him that way. It brought back the most painful memory of his life—except one other, which was that scene with Rose in her dressing-room when she had told him about those "spirit messages" and had been so terribly upset.

She was there now, standing at the gate in a thin white mist, behind the trees which enclosed the field. He was close upon her before he saw her, and when he said, "Hullo, Rose!" she turned in a startled way and he was shocked by seeing how ill she looked. For a moment she did not seem to recognize him, as though her mind had gone straying back to the scene of Mallard's death.

Then she put her hand on his arm, and said, "Hullo, Billy! Had breakfast?"

"An hour ago," he answered. "I thought you were still in bed."

"I've been for a walk," she said. "Not much sleep last night, Billy. Those silly nerves of mine!"

They walked together, turning into the woods which were quiet on this autumn morning. The bracken was red and innumerable cobwebs were white with hoar frost not yet melted by a pallid sun which glinted through the branches almost bare of leaves. Now and again a crumpled leaf, as yellow as gold, fluttered down upon them, and wet dead leaves lay thick on their track.

It was on the way home that he suddenly stopped and poked the sandy path with the ferrule of his stick and began to say the things that were in his heart rather than in his mind.

She listened to him—his disjointed sentences, his blundering offer of service, his desire to be with her for anything she might want, his humble plea that he loved her "for all he was worth"—and then she stopped him with both her hands on his shoulders and smiling eyes that were quite wet, he saw.

"Billy, I'm so sorry!" she said. "I'm glad of your dear love. But you see I belong to Adrian. I'm pledged to him. For all time, Billy."

"Isn't that rather morbid?" he asked rather brokenly. "I mean, doesn't life come first?"

"Adrian is waiting for me," she said. "Across the bridge, Billy. Don't you understand?"

Suddenly she began to weep painfully as she had done that night in the theatre, and he was alarmed again until she checked herself and said, "Sorry, Billy!" and went on ahead of him. Then he strode after her and walked by her side, silently.

"Forget all I said," he told her at their own gate, "unless one day you care to remember."

VIII

THERE was one of the maidservants in the hall when they went back and she was holding a visiting card. "A gentleman to see you, miss," she said to Rose. "I told him you were out, but he said he'd wait. He's in the drawing-room."

Rose took the card and then let it slip through her fingers to the floor.

"It's Emery Jago," she said, and her voice faltered.

"Leave him to me," said Neal.

He said it fiercely and strode forward as though with violent intent, but Rose held his arm.

"No, Billy! I must see him. He wants to tell me something. . . . He has written 'important' on his card."

He argued with her but she put her hand over his lips when he said he was going to kick the fellow out.

"Billy, please! Let me go to him. I insist."

He could not use force with her. She was mistress in this house and he had to obey her command.

"Don't see him," he implored as one last hope. "Let Boyd deal with him if you don't trust me. Or your father."

"I do trust you," she told him. "But this is my affair, Billy. You can't help me about this. Nobody can. Except God, perhaps."

She stood with her hand against the drawing-room door, drooping a little. Then quickly she drew herself up and took a deep breath like a long-drawn sigh and went into the room, closing the door behind her.

Neal could hear the voice of Emery Jago talking, talking, in a low monotone. Once or twice it rose harshly and passionately, as though speaking with anger, but the words were inaudible.

Young Neal went upstairs to Boyd's room where he was writing or doing some work with proof sheets. He looked up, smiling through his "horners" when Neal strode into his room after a sharp tap at the door.

"Hullo, Billy, my lad! You don't look happy with yourself. Have you come to murder a harmless pedagogue?"

"I want to murder a damned medium," said Neal. "That fellow Jago is downstairs talking his foul stuff to Rose. It makes me see red."

"Have a drink," said Boyd, pointing to a bottle on the mantelshelf. "Let's think this matter out calmly, without losing our common sense. I confess I don't like that particular medium. But I don't think we're justified in murdering him on a Sunday morning. Besides, I'm a pacifist!"

Young Neal sat for some time in a cane chair with his legs stretched out, smoking a cigarette moodily while Boyd talked some of his scientific stuff about psychology and the effect of internal secretions on human character. He seemed to think that the effect of Emery Jago on Billy was to stimulate the action of his suprarenal glands so that he had an instinctive desire to commit violence.

"Talking seriously, my lad," he said presently, "it's no use trying to bully Rose out of this belief in Jago's spiritual intercourse with poor Mallard. Our proper line to take is to expose him as a fraud—if he is a fraud! So far we haven't any evidence of that, though strong suspicions. In my opinion——"

He never stated that particular opinion because there was a timid tap at the door which interrupted his monologue. It was the little maidservant who had given Jago's card to Rose.

"I think you'd better come, sir, at once," she said, rather breathlessly. "The master is out and Miss Rose is not at all well."

"I thought there was a visitor with her," said Boyd, rising from his chair.

"Yes, sir. It was after that young man had left—a few minutes ago. She rang the bell and I found her on the floor, in a swoon like."

"Hell!" cried young Neal. He rushed out of the room, followed by Boyd, and was first down the stairs to the drawing-room where he found Rose sitting in one of the arm-chairs, white to the lips, with a look of terror in her eyes.

"Has he gone?" she asked in a dazed way, and a shudder passed through her, and she put her hands before her eyes as though to blot out some vision. Then she began to tremble again, as she had done that evening with her father, in a kind of ague.

Billy had his arms about her, although Boyd was there now, holding one of her hands and feeling her pulse.

"It's all right," said Billy soothingly, as though to a child. "He's gone. No reason to feel frightened. Boyd and I are with you."

"Billy, it's horrible," she said. "He wants me to marry him. He says he is Adrian. Every message that comes through from Adrian insists that I shall marry him. His eyes were beastly, Billy. He tried to put his arms about me. Oh, I can't bear it! I can't *bear* it! It's too horrible for words."

"He's mad," said young Neal. "He's an infernal swine. . . . God!"

"Steady, old lad," said Boyd, putting a hand on his shoulder.

IX

It was Boyd who had the idea of following Emery Jago into the village. It occurred to him that the fellow would probably have something to eat and drink there before going back to town, and he located him in the village inn where he was having a lunch of bread and cheese with a pot of tea. He was reading one of the Sunday papers—the *News of the World*—and was absorbed in some murder case when Boyd opened the door and stood behind him.

"Good morning, Jago," said Boyd quietly. "I want to have a talk with you."

Emery started in his nervous way and slopped some of the tea into his saucer as he put down his cup. Then he rose and smiled and held out his small, delicate hand.

"Oh, good morning, Professor Boyd. How did you find me out here?"

Boyd ignored his hand and shut the door behind him.

"The human animal needs food—generally at midday," he remarked rather grimly.

Then he waved a hand at Jago's chair and said, "Better sit down. I'll smoke a pipe if it won't spoil your food."

"Not at all," said Emery, civilly. "Pull another chair up, sir."

Boyd drew up the chair and loaded his pipe while Emery drank his tea and glanced at him slantwise over the rim of the cup.

"Look here," said Boyd. "You'd better leave Miss Jaffrey alone, or I'll put the police on to you."

Emery wiped his lips on the coarse table napkin which lay over his knee.

"For what purpose?" he asked, with a sharp look at Boyd. "That's rather a threat, isn't it?"

"Distinctly so," said Boyd. "I want you to take it as such."

Emery Jago shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm indifferent to it," he said. "No doubt you could trump up a charge against me as a fortune-teller."

"Precisely," said Boyd.

Emery smiled and put up his hands with a gesture of irony.

"That seems a rather unscientific method of investigation for a professor of psychology who believes in the supernormal faculties! I read your paper on cryptesthesia in the *Scientific Review*. Extremely interesting, if I may say so."

"Thanks," said Boyd grimly.

Emery nodded.

"Not at all. But I don't suppose it would convince a police court magistrate or a jury of shopkeepers. They wouldn't understand a word of it."

Boyd was rather knocked by that point of view. The fellow was right in a way. It wasn't by police methods that one could arrive at the truth about the supernormal mind. And it was remarkable that he had read that paper in which Boyd had confessed, indiscreetly perhaps, that a certain amount of evidence existed in regard to hidden and undeveloped senses outside the range of the normal processes of thought.

"I'm not here to discuss theoretical ideas," he answered, rather impatiently. "I've come here to tell you that Miss Jaffrey's friends object to your dealings with her. If you are not looking for trouble you must cease all communication with her. Please understand that very clearly."

"How about Mr. Mallard?" asked Emery. "Are you giving orders to him as well? Are you going to prevent him from coming back to the woman he loves? Can the police arrest that wandering spirit?"

He laughed harshly, and for a moment his eyes stared at Boyd with a sarcastic and challenging smile.

"Try and restrain yourself from talking nonsense," said Boyd sharply. "I am not one of your gullible

clients—those poor women in Brixton whose guineas you take after you've tricked them and frightened them."

A faint colour crept into Emery Jago's pale face, and his eyes narrowed for a moment.

"That's mere vulgar abuse," he said. "I disdain to answer it. I only challenge you as a scientist to find me out in any kind of fraud. Meanwhile, I shall continue to communicate messages from Mr. Mallard to Miss Rose Jaffrey. I shou'dn't be doing my duty to either of them—or to myself—if I were to desist from this mission. I am the human organism by which Adrian Mallard is enabled to return from the spirit world. Am I to betray that poor earth-bound soul?"

He rose from the table, letting that coarse table napkin drop to the floor. For a moment or two he paced up and down that little parlour of the country inn which had a glazed fish framed on one of the walls, and a portrait of Lord French over the mantelpiece, and the photograph of a young soldier of the Great War on the family Bible between two vases with "everlasting" flowers on a side-table.

Boyd puffed his pipe and watched him intently—this neurasthenic type, highly strung, pallid, unhealthy, but extraordinarily interesting. What chain of heredity had produced such a fellow?—what strange influences of environment and education?

"Professor Boyd," he said, suddenly stopping that nervous walk of his and looking straight into Boyd's eyes, "it is useless for you to tell me to keep away from Miss Jaffrey. I shall follow her wherever she goes. I am her destined lover. We were mated by the preordained laws of fate. She cannot escape from me nor I from her, even if we wished. Three times I have been seen with her in the crystal. It's foretold that my life is linked up with hers. And now at last I understand how and why. Do you wish to know?"

Boyd did not wish to know. He was startled by the look in Emery Jago's eyes. It was a kind of mystical light as though from some inner illumination.

"I will tell you," said Emery. "I am possessed by her spiritual lover. I am no longer Jago, photographer in Ezra Road, Brixton. I am Adrian Mallard, K.C.

I am Mallard. If you don't believe it—and I see you don't—come to my room to-night. The séance begins at ten o'clock. Lady Ardington will be there with some of her friends. You will see the materialized spirit of Mr. Mallard face to face, beyond any doubt. I challenge you to come, as a man of science and a seeker after truth."

Boyd accepted that challenge, not so much as a seeker after truth, but as a friend of Rose Jaffrey's. If he could expose this man's insanity or trickery—he could not make up his mind whether the fellow was mad or fraudulent—he might give peace of mind to that poor girl who had been so terribly frightened by these dreadful suggestions.

"I will be there," he said shortly.

"Splendid!" said Emery Jago. "And I hope to convince you, sir."

It was after Boyd's departure that he ordered a double whisky, and then another, so that he walked uncertainly up the road to the Hog's Back before getting the Aldershot bus to Guildford where he took a train back to London. People in the third-class carriage with him noticed his strange smile, as though he had some lovely and secret thought.

Boyd motored up to London that evening in his Morris-Cowley, leaving Billy over a game of chess with Mr. Jaffrey. Rose had gone up to her room after supper, when she had not eaten a morsel, and had tried to avoid Billy's watchful and anxious eyes.

X

It was a strange adventure for Boyd, not within the curriculum of a professor at King's College. He was a little late for the séance, having scraped the back wheel of a motor cyclist at Kingston, with consequent delays and much writing of notes by a zealous but unliterary young constable.

At the photographer's shop the side door was opened by Belle, who recognized Boyd and gave a little exclamation of surprise at the sight of him.

"You here, Mr. Boyd. Lor'!"

"Has the show begun?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Em gets a crowd now. He's becoming famous! I wouldn't be surprised if it turns his head."

She laughed in her shrill thin voice but not mirthfully.

"Do you take part in it?" asked Boyd, rather sorry for this white-faced girl.

"Not me!" she answered scornfully, and then covered up her candour by an afterthought.

"Em doesn't want me upstairs with such a crowd. Besides, I'm busy opening the door. . . . Here comes another."

It was a middle-aged man who looked like a captain in the merchant service. With a heavy tread he preceded Boyd upstairs to the room on the first floor. The light was up and Boyd took a vacant chair near the door. All the others were occupied by Jago's clients, a mixed crowd of ages and classes. At the far end of the room was Lady Ardington, with a mystical smile and a lorgnette through which she recognized Boyd when he came in. She waved her glasses at him, and said, "Dear man!" audibly. She had brought a party of young people with her—rather pretty girls who whispered to her now

and then and looked awed by the thought of coming mysteries. The rest of the company was made up of elderly men and women—from back streets of Brixton, no doubt: two hospital nurses, a young man with a pimply face, his rather lumpish-looking sweetheart, and a very old lady in an invalid's chair which must have been carried upstairs.

Various phenomena happened before Emery Jago appeared. There was the tinkling of tambourines, and an invisible guitar played in the direction of the ceiling. A portrait of the Prince of Wales suddenly jumped out of its frame over Lady Ardington's head and changed places with Tut-Ankh-Amen as reproduced in a full-page picture of the *Sphere* and stuck into a gilt frame from the Caledonian Market, to the great astonishment of the old lady in the invalid's chair and others on her side of the room. The coalscuttle by the fireplace rose several feet from the ground and came down again with a crash, upsetting some lumps of coal.

"*Poltergeist* stuff," thought Boyd. "Very silly and unconvincing."

But these occurrences had a psychological effect upon the audience. Some of them began to look uneasy and alarmed.

Then Emery Jago appeared through the curtains. He had changed his travelling suit for the black velvet coat and black trousers which seemed to be his professional costume. He hardly glanced at his company and seemed indifferent to their presence for several minutes while he moved the red lamp on its pedestal and adjusted the curtains of the alcove. Lady Ardington had clapped her gloved hands very softly, and bent down to whisper to one of her girls who was seated on the floor by her side. Presently Emery disappeared again through the black curtains and returned some minutes later with a coil of rope and a kitchen chair which he arranged in the alcove. He frowned once or twice when several people were whispering loudly and then spoke rather irritably.

"Can't we have silence here?"

After the hush that followed these words he made a speech in a quiet voice, sitting on the edge of a small table in an easy, unaffected way.

"As cool as a cucumber," thought Boyd. "A very remarkable fellow."

Emery began by explaining the various methods by which the spirits endeavoured to get into touch with the human mind. He had had a certain amount of success with most of these methods of communication, barring ectoplasm which was beyond his range of power and understanding. Spirits had spoken through him by means of the luminous trumpet, and directly by using his vocal chords, and indirectly by table-rapping and the use of the alphabet. He had a large collection of spirit photographs. He had obtained messages by slate-writing, by clairaudience, and by automatic writing. Some of these phenomena were doubtful when regarded from the point of view of scientific evidence. There was always a possibility of self-deception due to auto-suggestion and the mysterious workings of the subconscious mind —which had nothing whatever to do with the supernatural intelligence. In all cases the difficulties were considerable.

People imagined, he said, that the spirits ought to be able to communicate freely, and explain themselves perfectly. But that was absurd. They were up against the stupidity and insensibility of the average human mind. They were using clumsy instruments. Even a medium like himself, rather more sensitive than most people—neurotic as he would certainly be called by those who took a pride in being "normal" and insensitive to psychic influences—was hardly better than a cheap wireless set in which one had to fiddle around with a cat's whisker before hearing, very faintly and inadequately, and with frequent disconnections, some distant concert or public speech. People mustn't expect too much. The spirits were not to be coerced or dragooned into manifesting themselves. Conditions had to be perfectly favourable before they established contact. Irreverence, intellectual hostility, any physical interruption, any sudden switching on of light, any break in the chain of psychic fluid by people letting go of each other's hands caused an instant cessation of phenomena.

To-night he hoped to show them a materialized spirit. Alone in his own room that spirit had taken possession

of him on six different occasions, and had materialized out of the ethereal molecules of his earthly body. It was the spirit of a man who had lately passed over—a distinguished and well-known public man whose soul was earth-bound owing to a romantic and unsatisfied love. He need make no secret about it. It was the spirit of Mr. Adrian Mallard, K.C., whose face and figure would be well known to some of those present, including a very distinguished scientest who had been his closest friend and whose evidence would be conclusive. He referred to Professor Boyd, of King's College, whom he was glad to see with them to-night.

All eyes were turned in the direction of Boyd as Emery Jago looked at him pointedly, though until that moment he had not seemed to be aware of his presence.

"Blast the fellow!" thought Boyd. "What does he want to mention my name for?"

He felt self-conscious, and uncomfortable, and extremely annoyed.

"In order to make this séance a scientific test," said Emery Jago, "I want two men here to tie me up in this chair inside that alcove. You will see I have brought a rope for the purpose. After I have been tied up everyone in this audience must join hands and say the Lord's Prayer out loud and several times until something happens. That is the only condition I make, and it is essential to the hope of this materialization. If you unlink your hands you break the psychic chain. The repetition of the Lord's Prayer, which may seem irreverent to some of you and to others childish, is merely to produce a state of mental and spiritual concentration, eliminating as far as possible the usual distractions of the mind. Any other form of words would do just as well, but most of you know the Lord's Prayer and that is why I choose it. . . . Now then, I want two gentlemen to tie me up as securely as they know how."

It was the man who looked like a sea captain and the young man with pimples who undertook this task. The sea captain took some time and trouble about it, while Emery sat on the kitchen chair within the alcove. The pimply young man was not much more than an onlooker, leaving the real work to expert hands.

The seafaring man seemed satisfied with his job.

"If a man can get out of these knots I'll believe anything," he said with a gruff laugh.

"Draw the curtains," said Emery, "and put out the lights."

The seafaring man drew the curtains. The pimply young man put out the lights.

The room was so dark at first that Boyd could not even see the person sitting next to him—one of the hospital nurses. But presently, by means of the little red bulb on the pedestal, he could perceive the vague forms of the silent company and the folds of the black curtains and the edge of the table near the alcove in which Emery Jago sat in his bonds.

From that alcove came the voice of the medium.

"Join hands and recite the Lord's Prayer."

Boyd felt his right hand grasped by the hospital nurse, and his left hand by the thin hot fingers of the old lady in the invalid's chair. They all began to recite the Lord's Prayer in a low, reverent monotone.

"*Our Father, which art in heaven. . . .*"

"Billy would think this blasphemy," thought Boyd, "I don't quite like it myself, sceptic as I am."

He did not take part in that recitation but sat there with all his senses alert for the next act in this drama of the darkened room. What was that fellow going to do? It would be devilish clever to get out of that rope! The seafaring man had trussed him up in elaborate knots.

"*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done. . . .*"

It was when those words had been repeated for the third time that Boyd felt both his hands held more tightly, as though in fear, and was aware of something moving in the room a yard or so away from the alcove in which Emery Jago had been concealed. It moved toward the pedestal into the faint circle of rosy light from the little red bulb there, and as it did so Boyd saw that it was a human figure. It was the figure of a man wearing a dinner-jacket with a black bow above the white shirt front but invisible below his waist. It turned slowly in the direction of Boyd and its face was faintly visible. It was the face of Adrian Mallard.

In spite of his sceptical mind, his self-control, his

unemotional nature, Boyd felt his scalp tighten and a cold sweat moistened the palms of his hands. He was in a "blue funk," as afterwards he confessed. That was Mallard's face. Unmistakably. It was the poise of his head. That was the kind of bow he used to wear, loosely tied and rather large.

Then these things were true!... The dead came back!....

The figure moved away from the red lamp, less visible. But other people saw it. Someone gave a kind of gasp. Their breathing was loud and jerky. There was a sense of fear in the room.

It was a second or two later when Boyd tried to drag his hand out of the grasp of the hospital nurse on one side and of the little old lady on the other. They seemed aware of his effort to get free and the hospital nurse gripped him so that his hand hurt. The figure was passing the red lamp again. It turned and looked at Boyd again, with Mallard's face and Mallard's smile.

"Keep quiet!" said the hospital nurse, in a low, sharp whisper.

He was not quiet. He wrenched his hand out of her tight grip and made a dash at the figure, tackling low as in the football field. It struck him violently across the face before falling and lay there writhing with Boyd's hand fumbling for its throat.

"Lights up!" said Boyd. "Turn up the lights, someone!"

Someone switched on the lights and people sprang from their chairs talking loudly and angrily. They were angry with Boyd.

"Unfair!"

"Disgraceful!"

"Shocking!"

But he had Emery Jago all right. He lay there quiet now, choking under Boyd's grip. He wore a dinner-jacket and that large bow falling over his white shirt front above his black trousers, and he held something in one hand crumpled up against his side. Boyd wrenched it out of his clutch. It was some sort of mask made of soft wax upon which an enlarged photograph of Mallard had been pasted somehow. It was all crumpled up and unrecognizable as any kind of face.

Boyd stood up, breathing heavily. He was getting too old for this kind of exercise.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "this man is a damned imposter."

There were cries of "No! No!" from several women. They did not agree with him. That was the most astounding thing of all.

"I don't see it," said the seafaring man. "No mortal man could have got out of my knots. If that ain't supernatural, I don't know what is."

"You broke the psychic chain," said the hospital nurse, glaring at Boyd.

"Really, Professor Boyd," said Lady Ardington, "I'm distressed and shocked. That poor dear man looks half dead. And no wonder, after his spiritual exertions. I recognized Mr. Mallard *instantly*."

"You recognized his mask," said Boyd, holding out the crumpled bit of wax. "Very cleverly done, I must admit."

"It's ectoplasm," said Lady Ardington. "Most interesting and *perfectly* convincing."

Emery Jago staggered to his feet. His black trousers were covered with dust and there was a smudge of soot on his white shirt-front. He was dead white and his eyes blazed with rage.

"This is an outrage," he said sullenly. "It's damnable. If that brute hadn't half choked me——"

He made a threatening move toward Boyd, who clenched his fist and prepared for further action.

"How do you explain this?" said Boyd, holding out a messy bit of wax with scraps of wet paper sticking to it.

Emery Jago sat down on one of the chairs, feeling his neck and breathing heavily.

The people crowded round him with sympathetic words. The hospital nurse put some smelling salts under his nose until he pushed the bottle away with the back of his hand.

"Whatever any one says, I was possessed. I was possessed," he said. "Mallard materialized from my etheric body. That wax is like the spirit gloves. It's the medium they use."

He stood up and advanced upon Boyd again.

"I suppose you think you've exposed me," he said in a tone of sarcastic rage.

"I have," said Boyd. "You're a fraud like all the rest of them. I'm glad to know. I am going to tell a certain lady who believed in you."

"She will always believe in me," said Emery. "Nothing that you say will alter her dear faith in me."

"Stand out of my way!" said Boyd sternly.

Emery Jago stood with his arms folded, his company of friends about him, until Boyd struck him across the face with the back of his hand as once Emery had struck Belle Chubb. But it was Belle now who attacked Boyd, like a little tiger cat. She had been standing in the doorway listening to all this commotion, wondering at its meaning, frightened perhaps by the look of Emery Jago's face and his bleeding lip which had been cut by Boyd's signet ring. When Boyd struck him she sprang forward with a scream.

"Brute! How dare you strike my Em? Cruel old beast! Why don't you hit someone your own size?"

She slapped Boyd's face and her crisped finger nails scratched him down the cheek.

"And serve him right," said the hospital nurse. "Coming here like a bully! Disgusting, I call it!"

"Oh, Em!" cried Belle, and she put her arms round the man who treated her like a squaw, and kissed his pallid face until he thrust her back impatiently.

Boyd made a somewhat undignified exit with that scratch on his face and the remains of a wax mask in his pocket.

In the fresh air of the Ezra Road he laughed loudly, surprising a policeman on his beat. But it was not a laugh of pure mirth.

"The eternal gullible!" he said to himself. "How easy it is to dupe the mind of men! How difficult to get at truth!"

He had an uneasy conviction that if he hadn't grabbed that fellow Jago in the nick of time he would have believed, almost certainly, that he had seen the materialized spirit of his friend.

XI

After that supper, when she had not eaten a morsel and when young Neal had watched her with anxious eyes, Rose Jaffrey pleaded a headache and went up to her bedroom. It was quite true about that headache. She felt as though some part of her brain had caught on fire and was smouldering, with little spreading flames. For some time she stood in her room without turning on the light, but it was not quite dark there because of a faint whiteness which came through the window curtains. It was a moonlit night, and there were scurrying clouds in the sky, as she saw when presently she moved toward the window and looked out into the garden that Evelyn had made. She listened to the sounds coming up from that garden. The trees were swaying and their autumn-tinted foliage rustled. Some bird or beast gave a squeak now and then. Very clearly she could hear a motor-car over in the Hindhead direction, miles away, and presently saw its lights like a travelling star on the high ground above the trees.

She gave a little whimpering cry, which she hushed by pressing both hands against her lips. Later on—was it half an hour or an hour that she had stayed like this? —her hand felt for one of the electric lamps on her dressing-table and she turned on the light in its blue silk shade. She moved about the room, first to a writing-table in the corner where she kept Mallard's letters which she took out of a drawer and kissed—a little bundle of them—and then to the table by the side of her bed where there was a writing-pad and pencil. Once she went to the door and opened it an inch or two and listened intently. Billy was downstairs playing chess with her father. The servants had gone to bed. There was no sound in the house.

She shut the door again and went over to the dressing-table and cleared a space by pushing her hair-brushes and toilet things on one side. Then she sat down and wrote some pencilled letters by the light of the lamp with the blue shade. The first was to her father, and when she had written it she put her arms across it and laid her head on them and sobbed very quietly, for quite a long time.

Dearest Father (she had written) :

I'm so sorry but I have to leave you before I go mad. I am perfectly sane now, I think, but I am frightened by Emery Jago. I have been frightened ever since I went to his rooms that day when you came with me. All those messages seemed to come from Adrian. I could not help believing in them, but lately they have been so horrible that I have begun to doubt. Adrian—by those messages, I mean—says he wants me to marry Jago, because he is using Jago as his earthly body. I can't do it. I would rather die. So now I have decided to die. It's the best way of finding out the truth of things. I shall meet Adrian across the bridge. But I'm so sorry to leave you, my darling Father. You will be lonely without me and I wanted to look after you when you get really old. And I'm sorry to leave Billy, whom I love very much because of his beautiful love for me, without any selfishness. And I am a little sorry to go away from all those dear people who praised me more than I deserved—my public. It will be strange never to act again, and you will be disappointed because I never reached the fame you wanted for me. I was not a great actress, really, Father! I was only second-class in spite of all your teaching. But that doesn't matter now. Oh, Father, don't worry too much about me. I shall be waiting for you on the other side—and Mother will be there. I have put a kiss where I write my name. All my love is in it.

For ever and ever your loving,
Rose.

She wrote it in pencil but her name was smudged with tears.

She wrote another letter. It was to the boy she called

Billy, but need not be printed here, though he keeps it still.

It was a little before twelve when she went to her bedroom door and listened again. She could hear her father's voice talking to Billy, down there in the library. The staircase was still lighted by one lamp on the landing. For several minutes she stood outside her door with her fingers pressed against her forehead because of her headache. Then she stole downstairs, holding her breath, and passed the door of the library where her father's voice was droning. She turned and kissed both her hands toward the door, and the beauty of her face was touched by its agony. She went down the hall and through a little door which led to the front door, at the end of a small passage. It was locked and bolted and she had some trouble in drawing the bolts without a noise. One of them rattled and she heard her father's voice stop suddenly as though he had been startled by that sound. She drew her breath and listened and his voice went on again. The key clicked back in the lock, and she opened the door and closed it again very carefully behind her and went out into the drive.

The clouds were scurrying across the moon, and a wet wind pressed her thin frock tightly about her legs. She walked quickly at first, and then ran a little way after getting beyond the gate, and then walked again across the common and into a copse of silver birches where the ground dipped down. Her thin stockings were wet through by the damp undergrowth and her frock was torn by a thorn that caught it. She was frightened when a rabbit scuttled across her path and she gave a timid cry. Presently she came to a fence on one side of the track and a gate which seemed to reassure her about her direction. She turned right and ran again, a little out of breath, until she came to a pond half covered in weeds. A water-rat plopped into it as she stood ankle deep in mud on the edge of the weeds. The moon came out of a bank of dark clouds and shone on that slim figure standing so lonely there, and so frightened. She was frightened of the loneliness, and of those weeds, and of that silver-gleaming water, and of the way across the bridge. She waded waist deep

into the water and gave a scream that rang out through the woods and frightened the sleeping birds.

She was floating there with the moonlight on her face when Billy found her. He had heard the noise of the bolt drawn when Mr. Jaffrey had been telling one of his stories. For a moment he had let the old man go on but something made him feel afraid—the memory of Rose's eyes at supper that night, the look of terror in them. He and Mr. Jaffrey went up to her room and knocked. They found her letters there and Mr. Jaffrey gave a cry of anguish when he read the first line of one. Billy gave no cry, except in his soul to the God of his belief. He rushed out of the house and on to the common where he stood listening. Very faintly he heard a scream. It came from the direction of the pond where sometimes he had bathed on summer days, and he ran that way at top speed, falling once by catching his foot in a rabbit hole, and then running on again and calling out her name.

"Rose! . . . Rose! . . ."

He saw her floating with the moonlight on her face among the weeds. And with her there seemed to be someone else, as afterwards he told Boyd, swearing to the truth of it. He saw Mallard, or some intense mental vision of Mallard, standing there among the weeds, knee deep. He was leaning over Rose with his arms about her, until presently he turned a little and smiled at Billy. He was exactly as young Neal had known him in life, on that last day when he had played a game of tennis, except that he looked a little younger, more boyish, as in Orpen's portrait, in white flannels open at the neck.

Young Neal is certain that he saw Mallard.

THE END

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